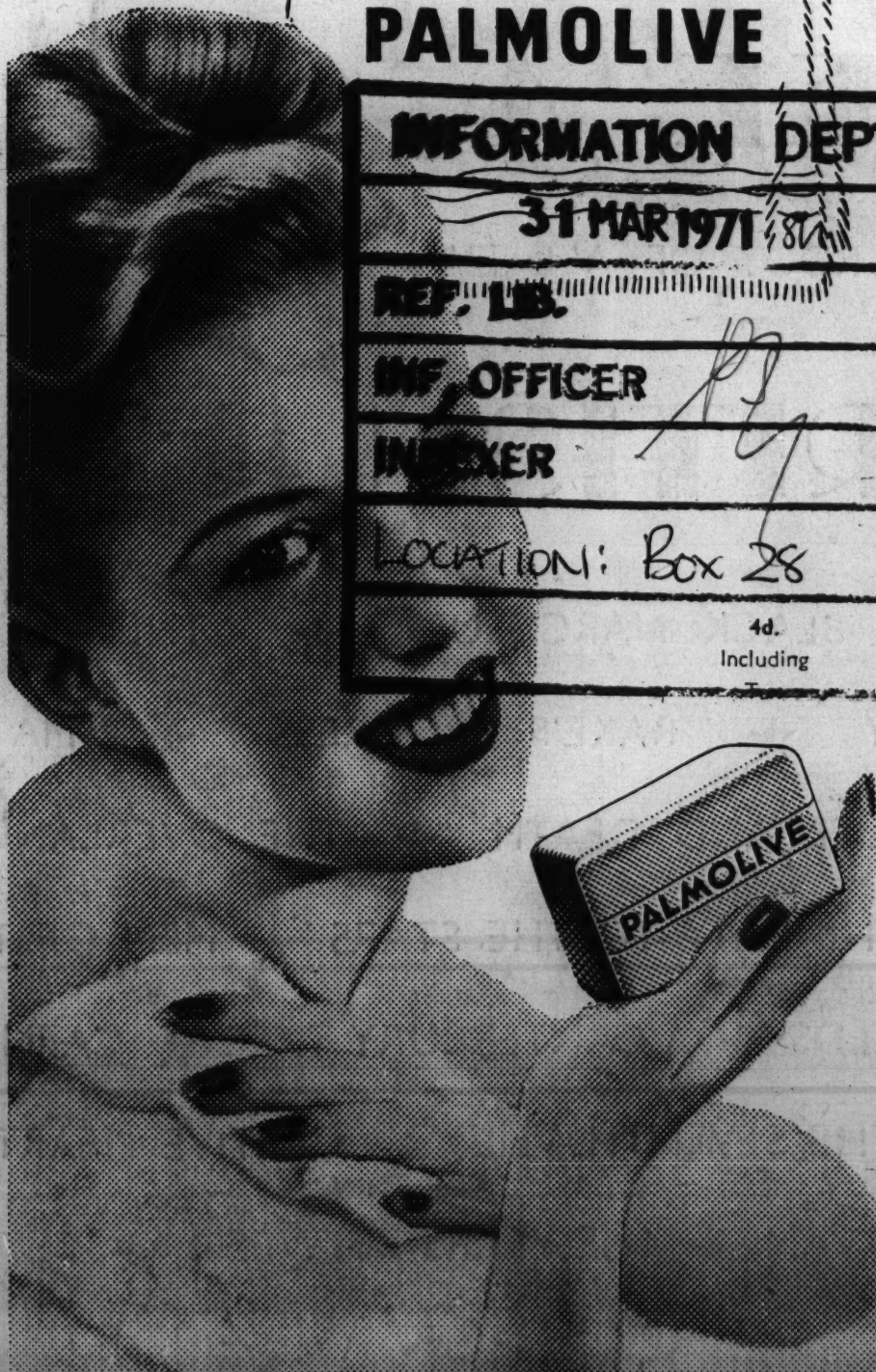


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film

Autumn 1946



Valerie Hobson as Estella, and John Mills as Pip, in Dickens' "Great Expectations," directed by David Lean for Cineguild.



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Cover. Michael Redgrave, actor, producer, poet and journalist, was born in Bristol in 1908, and made his first film, *Climbing High*, in 1938. He is married to actress Rachel Kempson. Among his best performances are Charleston in *Thunder Rock*, the mad ventriloquist in *Dead of Night*, and poet-flyer, David, in *The Way to the Stars*. His more recent films include *The Captive Heart*, *The Years Between*, and he is now completing *The Man Within* for Sydney Box and *Fame is the Spur* for the Boulting Brothers.



Deborah Kerr in "I See a Dark Stranger," written and produced by Frank Launder and Sydney Gilliat, and directed by Launder for Individual.

Some Films of 1946

• reviewed by *Peter Noble*

THE rising standard of British films apparent during the war years may prove to be something of a double-edged sword since it now gives us a new criterion upon which to base our judgments on the home product. Thus a recent group of British films which half-a-dozen years ago would have been considered outstanding must now be judged by our new standards, and each suffers accordingly. A film like *Caravan* may be dismissed since no critical standards need apply to this kind of production. One would not ask a serious book reviewer to pay attention to the latest cheap novelette; similarly such films as this may be relegated to their rightful position—as the lowest common denominator in movie entertainment.

But others, like *The Captive Heart*, *Beware of Pity* and *The Years Between*, do merit critical notice. One is a production by Michael Balcon, whose long line of successes at Ealing Studios have become household names in the British cinema; another is from a famous novel by a distinguished author; while the latter was produced by Sydney Box, whose *The Seventh Veil* has brought him quickly into the lime-light among our leading producers. Why then must each of these films be reckoned among recent disappointments?

The Captive Heart, directed by Basil Dearden in Germany and London, has touches of authenticity, while its delineation of character is sometimes subtle, often moving. To an extent the director has succeeded in portraying the decaying emotions and the mental turmoil of a group of British soldiers in a German prison camp. Some of the characters live and breathe, especially the hearty, horse-racing major of Basil Radford, the patient, kindly "old sweat" of Jack Warner, the impetuous, cocky "spiv" of Jimmy Hanley. Moving, too, somewhat surprisingly, are those stock characters, the blinded prisoner writing home to reject his sweetheart without telling her of his blindness, and the imprisoned pianist beating out his Prison Camp Concerto far into the night.

From the opening scenes, when the marching column of fatigued British prisoners straightens up as it reaches the gate of the Oflag, to the final scenes of liberation at a London port, the film holds one's attention. (There is an outstanding score by Alan Rawsthorne.) At all times one is absorbed in the lives and minds of these prisoners, in the way each one reacts, in the manner in which characters are subtly changed by the monotonous and apparently hopeless incarceration. Particularly good is one tense scene when Jimmy Hanley helps the Czech officer, finely played by Michael Redgrave, to escape among some repatriated prisoners.

What, then, is it, I repeat, which causes the film to be good, but not outstanding? It is, I believe, the conventional methods used by the director to take us back into the lives of certain of the men. Apparently feeling that audiences would be unable to concentrate their attention upon a continual background of the prison camp, Dearden, and his script-writer, Patrick Kirwan, have inserted a number of what prove to be irritating flash-backs. Immediately the camera leaves Germany and takes us with it to Clapham or Mayfair or Bootle, the film loses noticeably its effect, foregoes its shape. And in spite of the difference in the environments, each of these inserted episodes has a certain sameness, each makes us long to get back to the prisoners, back to real people.

The Captive Heart suffers from this unevenness, and through it just misses being a very fine film. One, nevertheless, carries away some vivid memories—Mervyn Johns tending the rabbits and quietly listening to the news of his wife's death as he strokes the ears of an Angora, the sequences—not original, but effective—where Rachel Kempson's voice is heard on the sound track as Redgrave reads her letters in a quiet corner of the camp (would that all the women were represented only vocally) and the scene—always potent—where Gordon Jackson discovers his permanent blindness. There is indeed a wealth of detail in the film, and one feels that a great deal of care and thought went into its production. Using as a yard-stick, however, such films as *The Way Ahead* and Ealing's own *San Demetrio London*, one is forced to relegate *The Captive Heart* to a secondary place among British productions of the past year or two.

Stefan Zweig's memorable novel, "Beware of Pity," offers a number of pitfalls to the unwary film director, and Maurice Elvey has not altogether managed to avoid them. The story of a cripple girl who falls madly in love with a young lieutenant in the Austrian Hussars is not easily filmable, since once the main thesis is stated (which takes about ten minutes of screen time) the rest of the film is taken up with a great deal of repetition. And, since this is so, one would not expect it to last almost two hours, as it does. One hesitates before condemning *Beware of Pity* for being occasionally dull and very often slow for the theme is worth-while and the treatment makes few popular concessions. It is obvious that a lot of thought has gone into its making: great pains have been taken to achieve authenticity both in period, place and costume, and, with occasional lapses, this care is rewarded with some success. The acting is, on the whole, good. Those screen veterans, Gladys Cooper and Sir Cedric Hardwicke, prove what a useful training Hollywood can be, and both Albert Lieven and Lilli Palmer have many good moments. In spite of its moving story, however, *Beware of Pity* nowhere possesses the capacity to move an audience: and that is its main fault.

The Years Between, from the successful play by Daphne du Maurier, does not by any means deserve a detailed criticism, and is the kind of lamentably "good class" film that Britain made so often before the war, with a nice comfortable English background of nice comfortable people with nice comfortable emotions and incomes. It is about a Tory



Edward G. Robinson, Loretta Young and Orson Welles in "The Stranger," written by Victor Trivas, and directed by Welles for International-R.K.O.

M.P. who joins the army as a high ranking officer and is afterwards killed in Europe. His wife, left with a small son, at first grieves, but afterwards takes over her husband's work and becomes an M.P. in his place (while the family Nanny—a wretched creature—looks after the unlovable brat). She finds herself in love with a neighbouring farmer, a dull, long-suffering type, who looks, anyway, as though he would be far happier among his pigs. Then comes a minor bombshell. The husband returns from the dead, apparently none the worse for his experience. He is bewildered by the changes which have occurred, and downright angry when he learns that his wife has taken his place in the House of Commons. But, after a clash of temperaments, the inevitable—and highly unconvincing—reunion takes place.

These are the bare bones of a little film which has nothing very much to recommend it, except the disgruntled performance by Michael Redgrave and some nice touches of satire in the scenes where the local Tory Party decide to adopt the wife as their prospective M.P. In spite of apparent authenticity, the Parliament sequences are none too realistic, and the final episode, when Redgrave and his wife both appear as M.P.s (she has miraculously popped up on the other side of the House, and presumably altered her Party line), is frankly ludicrous. Not a very good effort from the director (Compton Bennett) who gave us *The Seventh Veil*, and not a very good advertisement for the British people, since the synthetic emotions of this collection of county types are not really worth the celluloid it took to reproduce them.

Wanted for Murder also fails to be completely satisfying. Due to hesitant direction the film does not give us more than a hint of the motivation behind the actions of the murderer (compare this with the Swedish film *Frenzy*). But Eric Portman, as the young man about town with a *penchant* for strangulation, is as good as the film will let him be, and sometimes that is very good indeed. In a meandering production, which is notable for some good shots of London, and excellent performances from Roland Culver and Stanley Holloway, the work of Portman stands out. One of our leading screen actors, he succeeds in bringing credibility, realism and sympathy to a thinly-drawn role. Particularly memorable is the scene where, distraught, he leans over Chelsea Embankment and prays that his terrible affliction will leave him. Here, and in other instances, he brings some depth to a complex character who is at times strongly reminiscent of Peter Lorre's child murderer in Fritz Lang's memorable film *M*. But the film proves too much for Portman, and after an almost laughable final sequence, with the Army, Navy, Air Force and Police all surging into Hyde Park to capture the poor creature, the film ends on a weak note. Other reviewers have been quick to notice that the working class characters, a shop girl and a bus conductor, as played by Dulcie Gray and Derek Farr, spoke with accents varying nicely between Mayfair and West Kensington. I was assured by a leading player in *Wanted for Murder* that any hint of Cockney authenticity was avoided, since Middle West audiences, at whom presumably this Twentieth Century-Fox British film is aimed, expect to hear nothing but the most genteel accents in British films. They will not be disappointed.



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One cannot hazard such a guess about the British musical *Gaiety George*, a fair effort to capture the atmosphere of Edwardian London, with Richard Greene as the founder of the Gaiety Tradition, and Ann Todd as his long-suffering wife. No fireworks here for Miss Todd, who, however, comes off surprisingly well in a production which manages to be fairly entertaining. The same cannot be said about *Bedelia*, a naive, stagey and unhappy excursion into crime, with a genteel English murderess, unconvincingly played by Margaret Lockwood.

Outstanding among recent Hollywood films is a movie in the genre of *Farewell My Lovely* and *Laura*, called *The Dark Corner*, directed by Henry Hathaway. This taut, tough excursion into crime pretends to be nothing more than a thriller, which is the reason it is so effective. The director has caught beautifully the New York background of the East Side, the Elevated Railway, the murky back streets, the dismal tenements, and varies this with the lush interior of a suave, effeminate art dealer's establishment, presided over by that delightful actor, Clifton Webb. A newcomer, Mark Stevens, gives a likeable performance, but it is Lucille Ball, as a wise-cracking secretary, William Bendix as a hired killer, and Kurt Kreuger who steal the honours in this extremely well-acted film.

Stevens is also seen in *From This Day Forward*, a quiet little story directed by John Berry, a new name of some promise. Like John Houseman, now a producer at Paramount, Berry was associated with Orson Welles in those hectic days of the Mercury Theatre. He demonstrates a keen, native feeling for a little-known side of American life, and he takes his camera faithfully into the lives of an ordinary New York couple. *From This Day Forward* tells us more about Americans than any number of star-studded musicals, and is a film which will stand out among the best seen this year.

It has been remarked elsewhere in this issue that films occur in trends or cycles; just now we are experiencing a "psychological" cycle. Perhaps the best we have seen so far is Alfred Hitchcock's *Spellbound*, distinguished by a skilled Ben Hecht script, impeccable performances by Ingrid Bergman and Gregory Peck and superb acting by half-a-dozen lesser-known smaller part players. Bergman, as a woman psychiatrist trying to psycho-analyse the man she loves, whom everybody believes to be a murderer, is remarkable in the way that she brings truth and realism to what might have been, in someone else's hands, the sheerest melodrama. May I put on record that Bergman ranks with Bette Davis as the finest screen actress of our time. *Spellbound* is an entertaining, intelligent and completely adult film, and Bergman's performance is not the least of its attractions. One should watch Michael Chekhov to see how beautifully a non-showy role may be played, and one can discern in Gregory Peck an actor of subtlety and sensitivity who will shortly receive his just acclaim. *Spellbound* is admittedly full of directorial tricks, but who would want it otherwise? Hitchcock has used his camera as imaginatively as Griffith, he has sought to strip the mind of its mystery in much the same way that Stroheim did twenty years before him, and he is wholly successful.

Disney's new film, *Make Mine Music*, is a cartoon revue owing a

little to *Fantasia* and a lot to *Ziegfeld Follies*. It is, in fact, a popular edition of the former and contains something in it to please almost everybody. There are ten separate items, one or two of which are quite outstanding, especially the surrealist interpretation of jazz music and the touching little story of the fedora hat who loves a little blue bonnet perched in the same shop window. My particular favourite was the sequence, "Peter and the Wolf," that delightful fairy tale by Serge Prokofiev, while always intrigued by hill-billy humour I found the episode "The Martins and the Coys," quite diverting. *Make Mine Music* does not represent any particular development in the cartoon form, rather is it a series of good cartoons strung together with no particular cohesion. It is, however, undoubtedly good screen entertainment.

Only Hollywood can make films like *The Blue Dahlia*, and *Mildred Pierce*. The former owes something to *Farewell My Lovely*, and a little to *Spellbound*; here again the acting honours go to William Bendix as a shell-shocked soldier. He is rapidly becoming a really first-rate actor, while Howard da Silva, so excellent in *The Lost Weekend* and *Two Years Before the Mast*, brings to his hackneyed role occasional touches of near genius. Paramount have a valuable piece of property in Mr. da Silva, an intelligent and independent stage player who will quickly move into the front ranks of screen personalities if given the right opportunities.

Many of us who have admired Joan Crawford since the era of *Our Modern Maidens* and *Our Dancing Daughters* have watched her develop into an admirable actress who, when given chances as in *A Woman's Face*, is able to out-act most of her contemporaries. It is therefore with particular pleasure that I commend her performance, for which, incidentally, she won the Academy Award, in *Mildred Pierce*, a competent melodrama, which also contains good performances from Zachary Scott, newcomer Ann Blyth, and a favourite of this column, Jack Carson.

A glance back over the titles seen in the past few months reveals that I have barely touched upon at least another half-dozen films which are worthy of mention. *The Strange Love of Martha Ivers*, a melodramatic hotch-potch, with curious direction by Lewis Milestone, gives us once more the Barbara Stanwyck we admired in *Double Indemnity*, and the Van Heflin, a hint of whose power and brilliance we saw a few years back in *Johnny Eager*. For their work alone this film was worth seeing. *Dragonwyck*, a slow and undistinguished effort saw an outstanding performance from Vincent Price, whose work in *Leave Her to Heaven* and *The Song of Bernadette* have marked him out as a Hollywood name to watch. That beautiful French film, *Le Jour Se Lève* was given a general release in the summer and was thus seen by many filmgoers who would otherwise have had no chance to do so. The acting of Jean Gabin and, for that matter, of Jules Berry, Arletty and Jacqueline Laurent, possesses such an astonishing realism that few of the Hollywood or British films mentioned above deserve to be bracketed with it. France has still a great deal to offer in the realms of film-making, and if, as it seems, *Le Jour Se Lève* is to be bought and

destroyed so that Hollywood may add plagiarism to its many crimes, 1946 will be a black year indeed in the history of cinema.

Frank Launder and Sydney Gilliat are fast becoming among the most important names in British cinema. For many years they have been well-known as the joint screenwriters of some of our best films, and more recently they have come to the fore by producing, writing and directing such films as *Millions Like Us*, *Waterloo Road* and *The Rake's Progress*. Sydney Gilliat has produced and Frank Launder directed *I See a Dark Stranger*, a witty comedy about spies in Eire and Britain. Deborah Kerr plays Bridie, the Irish girl who has been brought up in an atmosphere of Cromwell-baiting and English-hating. When she is twenty-one she leaves her Irish village full of angry notions about the English, and very soon she is caught up in a plot to help a Nazi to escape from an English prison. As in most of Hitchcock's works, there is an air of improbability over many of the incidents, but so light-hearted in vein is the treatment of the film, so deftly does it flit from Eire to the Isle of Man and back again to an English village, so beautifully has it caught the character of the neutral Irish during the war, so grandly does it give us glimpses of the English and Irish countryside, that the film must be reckoned an unqualified British success.

Deborah Kerr has never been photographed better, nor has she given a better performance than she does here as the wayward Irish girl who spies for Germany, and falls in love with an English naval officer, played with a delightful touch of humour by Trevor Howard. Some of the other parts are impeccably acted: Raymond Huntley is quite superb as a Nazi agent, James Harcourt is a truly wonderful Dickensian invalid and Garry Marsh, in the part of an unintelligent Intelligence officer is a constant delight. The clear-cut and imaginative photography by Wilkie Cooper is an example of how to photograph our natural resources, the direction of Launder is first-rate, while some of his deft touches, like the railway carriage scene, the hotel bedroom scene and the incident where the girl disposes of the dead body, are all moments of true suspense in the Hitchcock manner. And, above all, *I See a Dark Stranger* possesses throughout the quality of wit.

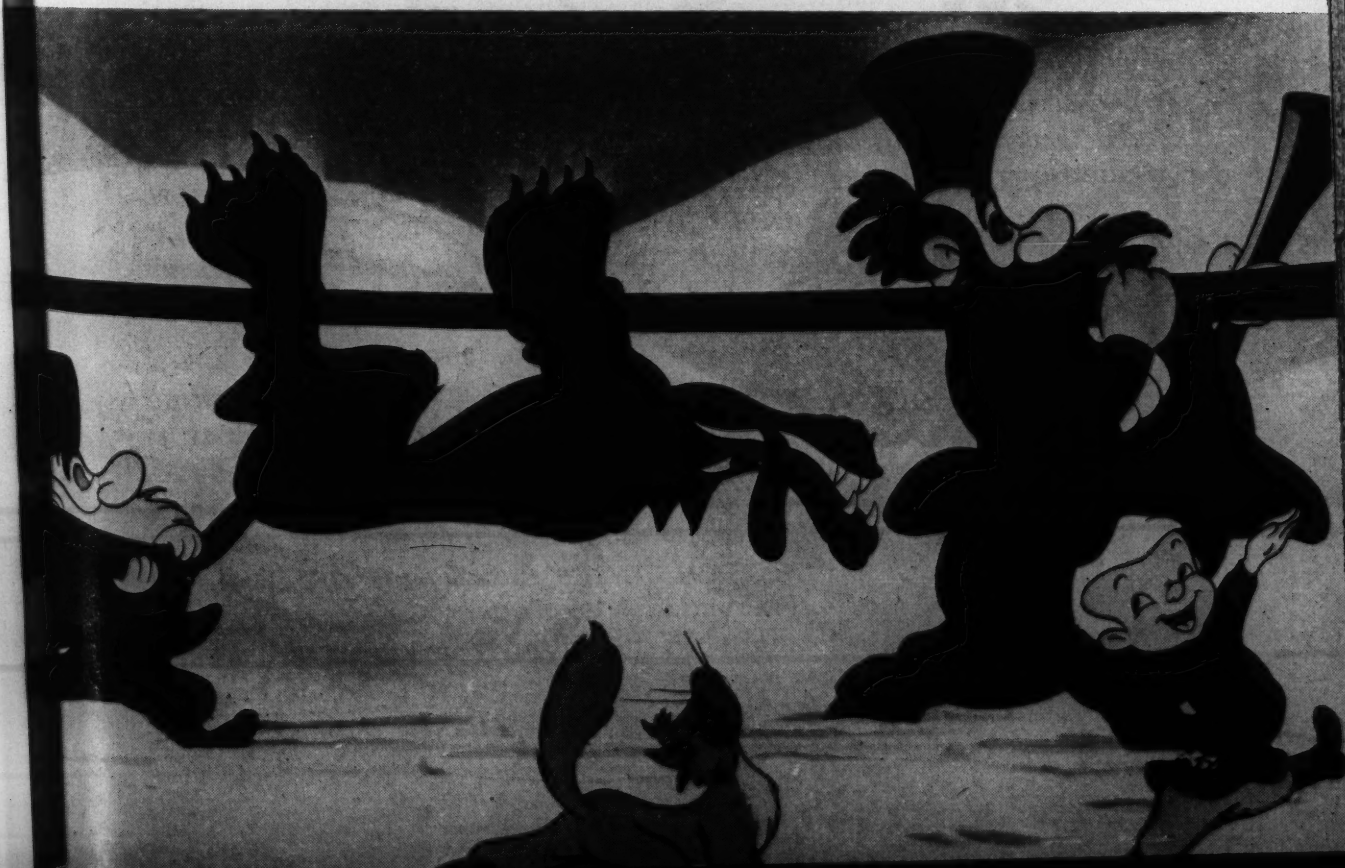
Most of my readers will have seen the Marx Brothers in *A Night in Casablanca*; those who have not should quickly repair the omission, since this new film is well up to the standard of *A Night at the Opera*, though not in the same class as *Duck Soup*, *Animal Crackers*, and others of that *genre*. Those early vintage Paramount comedies have never been equalled by the mad Marxes, but *A Night in Casablanca* came near at times to the best moments in *Horsefeathers*, and *The Coconuts*. Groucho is still the same arrogant, lovably lecherous figure, while Harpo and Chico add to the fun as a couple of Casablanca characters in an atmosphere of beautiful spies, Nazi agents, secret plans and all the other paraphernalia of a hundred Hollywood movies. In short, this is a glorious burlesque, directed with quick satire by Archie Mayo.

I resented the fact that there was a story at all, since I prefer my Marx Brothers absolutely straight, undiluted by a plot or by the



Above—Gregory Peck and Ingrid Bergman in Alfred Hitchcock's "Spellbound" (Selznick-United Artists).

Below—Prokofiev's fairy tale, "Peter and the Wolf," one of the ten sequences in Walt Disney's "Make Mine Music" (R.K.O.-Radio).



uninspired love interests which obtruded in the series which they made for M.G.M. a few years ago. But, of its kind, this is a first-rate comedy, to be seen again and again. The gags are good, the film moves swiftly, the brothers are—just themselves. Need more be said?

Orson Welles comes back with a bang as director and star of *The Stranger*, an impressive effort. His work as the Nazi is outstanding, while Edward G. Robinson and Loretta Young give first-rate performances. The *panache* which Welles demonstrated in *Citizen Kane* and *Journey into Fear* is again in evidence; he acts in the grand manner, but not unsuccessfully. This fine film should bring back Welles' reputation in Hollywood, a reputation incidentally which since *Kane* has remained constantly high with filmgoers, if not with film producers.



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The Versatile Ustinov ✓

—a profile of the youthful actor — producer — playwright who has recently turned film director.



AMERICA has Orson Welles. Britain has Peter Ustinov who, at twenty-five, seems likely to rival the brilliant reputation of the youthful Orson. As actor, playwright, screen-writer, stage producer and film director, Peter Ustinov has achieved considerable status in England during the past few years. He has been a youthful prodigy since he wrote his first play at the age of fourteen, he has been a favourite with London theatre audiences since he stopped the show nightly at the Players Theatre and later on in Herbert Farjeon's revue *Diversion* at Wyndhams Theatre six years ago. He has been acclaimed as one of Britain's most promising playwrights since his first play, *House of Regrets*, was produced at the Arts Theatre in 1942. Since then he has written, in collaboration with Eric Ambler, a film, *The Way Ahead*, considered to be one of the best British movies ever made, he has served four years in the Army, has produced plays starring such distinguished English stage players as Dame Edith Evans, Mary Morris and Clifford Evans, and has written, conceived, co-produced, and directed a film called *Top Secret*, starring Ralph Richardson from the Old Vic. And all this at twenty-five!

Peter was born in England of Russian parentage. His great-uncle is the famous designer of the Russian Ballet, Alexander Benois, his mother is the well-known painter and designer Nadia Benois, his wife is Isolde Denham, daughter of playwright and producer Reginald Denham, and one of the best of the younger English actresses. Ustinov went to school in London at the historic Westminster School, where he wrote his first play, naively titled *Uneasy Lies the Head*. He was, he admits, not very impressed with his first work, but the urge to write plays was rooted very strongly within him. "I was not very good at school," he says, and soon he left Westminster and joined as a student at the London Theatre Studio, a former warehouse in Islington, in North London, where the distinguished French producer, Michel St.

Denis, founder and director of the famous Parisian theatre group La Compagnie des Quinze, taught the fundamentals of acting and production to a number of young people, many of whom are now well-known on the London stage.

In the summer of 1939, at the age of eighteen, Peter made his professional debut as an actor in a summer playhouse at Shere, called The Barn Theatre, whose director was youthful John Burrell, now director of the Old Vic. Company. The war interrupted Peter's career at The Barn, and 1940 found him with a group of gallant youngsters at the tiny Threshold Theatre, an experimental playhouse at Notting Hill Gate. Here Ustinov met his wife, also playing her first roles on the London stage, and it is interesting to note that among the youngsters who formed this enthusiastic group were Michael Warre, Robert Beatty, Elwyn Brook-Jones and Richard Wordsworth. These young people defied the air-raids on London and throughout the summer of 1940 they continued to produce a good deal of worth-while drama, including Jean Sarment's play *Fishing for Shadows*, which Peter translated and appeared in. It was a fair success and afforded the London critics an opportunity to see his work performed for the first time in London. Nearly two years later his play, *House of Regrets*, produced by Alec Clunes at the Arts, brought Peter high praise from the London Press. "This twenty-one year old playwright has written the best play of the war." So wrote the critic of the *Daily Mail*, and others were as enthusiastic. A new British playwright had arrived.

Between the production of *Fishing for Shadows* and *House of Regrets*, Ustinov, who had for many years showed a remarkable aptitude for mimicry and impersonations, had left the Threshold, which had been bombed, and was appearing with great success at the little Players Theatre in Mayfair. His impressions of famous London personalities, and especially his impersonation of an opera singer, brought him into the limelight and resulted in his being given a contract by producer Herbert Farjeon. In 1941 Ustinov's act in Farjeon's revue *Diversion* was a personal triumph, but he still continued to write plays, considering that his experience in the theatre was only useful in so far that it enabled him to write better plays for other actors to appear in.

Following the success of his *House of Regrets*, his new play, *Blow Your Own Trumpet*, was bought for production by the Old Vic. Company, and staged by Michael Redgrave. This play, however, did not meet with such a good reception, and ran for less than a dozen performances. Undaunted, the boy wrote a new play, *The Banbury Nose*, in which he confounded the critics by writing the play backwards, commencing the play with the final curtain and finishing with the opening scene!

Plans were afoot for Ustinov to appear in his own play, but by this time he had been cast for a new role—and entered the British Army (which had other and more important plans for the young actor and playwright). When *The Banbury Nose* was produced—it ran for six months—Ustinov was engaged in various military enterprises about which he is now noticeably reticent. While in the Army he managed to find time to write film scripts for the Army Film Unit (one of which

was the famous training film *The New Lot*), to produce and appear in plays at the Army's own Garrison Theatre at Salisbury, to write two more plays, and to collaborate with Eric Ambler on the screen play of *The Way Ahead*, which proved to be not only an outstanding British film, but one of the best war films ever made. Peter was released from the Army for a period to appear in this production, and gave a memorable performance in the part of an Algerian café proprietor.

Back in England from Morocco, where many of the scenes from *The Way Ahead* were shot, Peter returned to Service routine and wrote plays for the Army Bureau of Current Affairs, which organisation staged a number of his short pieces for the Services, using the well-known Living Newspaper technique, to which some of Ustinov's work is particularly suited.

Ustinov's more recent plays include *The Man Behind the Statue*, *Paris Not So Gay* and *The Tragedy of Good Intentions* (which was recently produced in Liverpool by the Old Vic Company). Himself an actor, he writes plays for actors. Even the smallest Ustinov character are worth-while acting parts and in this his work bears a similarity to that of Bernard Shaw, of whom it is quite rightly said that he has never written a bad acting role. And, it is, of course, as a playwright that Peter is known best, although filmgoers will perhaps remember his fat-faced school-boy in the film *The Goose Steps Out*, and his powerful acting as the pathetic Van der Lubbe in the Reichstag Fire film, *Mein Kampf-My Crimes*. He was seen as the Dutch priest in *One of Our Aircraft is Missing*, and, of course, in one of his favourite roles, Ristori in *The Way Ahead*.

Ustinov could have a great career as an actor ; there are too few young character actors in British films. Thus in applauding his decision to have a hand in the actual production of the films which he writes, one may also hope that his work in British studios during the next few years will not be solely confined to the director's chair. (It is good to hear that in early 1947 he is producing, directing and writing a thriller for Two Cities, in which he will also play a leading role.) At the moment he is finishing the 'Two Cities' film *Top Secret*, the story of that fascinating invention Radar.

At the time of writing he has returned to the London stage, and is appearing with Dame Edith Evans and John Gielgud in Rodney Ackland's adaptation of Dostoievsky's *Crime and Punishment*, and he will continue to act in this play until his new film takes the floor at Denham in a few months' time. His performance as the middle-aged Chief of Police in the Dostoievsky story has already been highly praised by London critics, and reflects yet another facet of this young man's astonishing talent.

Peter Ustinov seems to be equally brilliant as actor, writer, producer, director, comedian, dramatist, and defies adequate classification either professional or social. He belongs to no particular theatre set, he is no inveterate party-goer or good time boy. His work has always conveyed that he is trying to raise the standards of both the English stage and screen, while his avowed intention is to play his part in bringing grandeur, courage and intelligence to our theatre. Amusing and witty,

he is a one-man party entertainment (his superb impersonation of J. B. Priestley being among the best of his uncanny essays in mimicry). Often he is extremely serious. "From the indications I have seen," Ustinov once said, "after the war there will be a great flowering of all branches of dramatic talents. The actors are there but the writers are what great actors need." Those who know this energetic youngster are assured that he will go on playing an increasingly important part in providing the future material for great acting; already he has made considerable achievements in this direction. He is a perpetually busy young man, though he confesses to being extremely lazy about things which ought to be done, like writing letters and renewing club subscriptions. His recreations are working, listening to classical music, playing tennis and eating sweets. His pet hates, he says, are "Alsations, politicians and danger, in that order."

Quiet, twinkling-eyed, chubby-faced, burly, with a slow infectious grin, Ustinov is reminiscent of a rather jolly, clumsy puppy. An engaging personality, amusing company, an animated talker, an even better listener, actor-playwright-film director Ustinov promises to be possibly one of the greatest creative forces in the English film and theatre. Behind him are seven years of theatre experience, both in civilian life and in the Army. Before him lies an enchanting vista of fame, popularity and success.

"The Play's the Thing"

★ says

ROBERT LANTZ

CONTRARY to the cynical belief of most picturegoers and—alas—many producers, you cannot make a good film without a good story. But nobody seems to know what exactly is a good film story: boy meets girl isn't enough any more. The boy must be an unusual one; the girl must be extraordinary; the situation in which they meet must be original; the conflict between them must be highly individual. Love has been doled out on the screens of the world so often and so monotonously that it has become rather dull, unless some spice is added; one couldn't even stand *Amber* forever.

While millions of film fans may be very willing to remain faithful to familiar stars, they want to see Garson and Hayworth and Bogart and Olivier in unfamiliar parts. The routine pattern of film stories frankly bores most audiences. Something new is wanted ; something new must be supplied.

So Hollywood and Denham turn to the successful novelists, and pay fabulous prices for best-selling novels. In the last couple of years or so, not a single work of fiction on America's best-seller lists has escaped picturisation, be it ever so unsuitable a film-subject, on the face of it. Stories like *The Lost Weekend* defied all the rules of the boy-meets-girl school of thought ; yet the film was a hit. Bing Crosby separated himself from Dorothy Lamour's sarong and portrayed a priest (of all the characters to be picked for a crooner), and *Going My Way* was a hit. Gregory Peck emerged as a star from the Cronin film *The Keys of the Kingdom*. The same author's *The Green Years* is a current success in America.

But most sought-after of all were the hit plays of Broadway and Shaftesbury Avenue. Most of them were bought, although some of them haven't been filmed yet. Among the older plays that come to mind are Terence Rattigan's *Flare Path*, which Twentieth Century Fox owns, and Werfel's *Jacobowsky and the Colonel*, the property of Columbia Pictures. Of last season's Broadway plays, two were bought for the nice tidy sum of £75,000 each : *State of the Union* and *Dream Girl*. Ronald Colman and Peggy Cummins will be co-starred in *The Late George Apley*, for which nearly £70,000 was paid.

Alexander Korda has bought Norman Ginsbury's Prince Regent comedy, *The First Gentleman*, and the Frances Brett Young play, *A Man About the House*. Anatole de Grunwald is filming Rattigan's *While the Sun Shines*. Columbia's new British film, *This Man is Mine*, is based on Reginald Beckwith's comedy, *A Soldier for Christmas*. *Quiet Weekend*, the Esther McCracken hit, has just been released. Ronald Millar's *Frieda* will be filmed by Ealing Studios. *Portrait in Black* is due for filming in Hollywood, to be directed by Britain's brilliant Carol Reed. Daphne du Maurier's *The Years Between* was turned into a picture by Sydney Box. The Purcell-Parr Davis musical, *The Lisbon Story*, and the Canadian Navy revue, *Meet the Navy*, were filmed. Obviously, the play is the thing, for it is assumed by the producers that, if a stage play could draw a few hundred thousand visitors to the expensive theatres, the film version will draw millions to the cheap cinemas.

With the liberation of the Continent, story material has become available in France and other countries, and all new plays everywhere will receive the close attention of film companies. For as long as the majority of writers will work on plays or books, and not directly for the screen, the industry must look for stories outside the studios. But the day will come—and I don't think it is very far off—when "the screen-play," conceived exclusively for the screen, and not for the stage, will be the thing.



"PETRUS"

Photographs by Hans Emil Staub

Fernandel and Simone Simon in a new Marc Allegret film, recently produced in French and English at the Munchenstein Studios.

Top right—Allegret directs Fernandel in a death scene.

Bottom—Simone Simon and Fernandel in the scene as it appears in the film. The cast of "Petrus" also includes Marcel Dalio; the film will be shown in London early next year. (These exclusive photographs were sent from Zurich by our Swiss correspondent, Hans Elsner).



"Frenzy"

reviewed by
Rosie Macdonnell

A FILM shown recently in London, at the Academy, makes Hollywood look more than ever like the eternal kindergarten. *Frenzy*, the film in question, comes from Sweden and if I were a newspaper film critic awarding stars to pictures, this one would be in the top category plus. It is a beautifully produced, acted and directed picture, with an adult approach very rarely seen on the screen. It is a fascinating subject, and succeeds in what should be the aim of any really good film—to hold one's complete interest. Never for a moment does the story lose its power; from the time it unfolds to the very climax we are held in the grip of the narrative. The subject is far from pleasant, but the film's stark realism is so singularly convincing, its characters so well drawn, and the continuity of the story so well balanced, that it deserves the highest praise.

It is the story of Jan-Erik Vidgren, a young student about to take his final school examination. The film opens brilliantly with various impressive shots of the historic school building, showing the boys assembled for prayers. The camera introduces us to Vidgren and his colleagues and immediately the personality of each of the leading characters is impressed upon our mind. The next scene, in the graduate classroom, shows us the hated schoolmaster, nicknamed Caligula, examining them in Latin. Caligula is a sadist. As he moves about the class-room, the atmosphere is heavy with hatred and loathing. The eyes of a maniac hidden behind glasses, the catlike movements, the staccato sentences so full of venom and irony, all show signs of a repulsive misfit, the bully who delights in torturing his weaker fellow beings. Cleverly the beginning of the mental battle between the master and Vidgren is sketched. We see Vidgren's home, solid and decent, a stern father, a timid mother, both deeply worried at the boy getting a bad mark before his finals. There follows an evening in the company of his school friend Sandstroem. In spite of his uttering clichés about women and generally affecting an air of worldliness, there is something quite endearing about this gay young man, who is devoted to his more idealistic friend, while the personality of Vidgren himself is absolutely striking; looks and youth are all on his side, but there is something more to him than this. Some deep inner strength of character radiates from him, which makes his performance stand out as quite exceptional.

The evening with Sandstroem is to end on a fatal note, however. While slowly walking home after having bid his friend goodnight, he meets the girl from the tobacconist shop, who is extremely drunk. He escorts her home to her lodgings and is finally seduced by her (a wonderfully tender sequence). Real love develops between them and she confides in him that there is someone in her life who terrifies her, who makes her drink and do things she doesn't want to do, who forces her to listen to the most terrible and bestial stories. Shaken and frightened, clinging to him, she refuses to tell Vidgren the name of the man, but hands him the key of her flat, telling him she will feel safer.



"FRENZY"

directed for Svensk by Alf Sjöberg

*Above—*Stig Jarrel as the sadist, Caligula,
and Alf Kjelling as the schoolboy.

On the right—

Mai Zetterling as the tortured girl.



Vidgren has gone to see the girl again. To his horror he finds her as drunk as when he first met her. All he can make of her incoherent talk is that "the torturer" has returned. The telephone rings. She answers it in terror. Disgusted to find that she has succumbed again, the boy leaves her. But the strain of the impending exam. and his love for the girl have been too much; he collapses seriously ill. Recovered, he is determined to cut the girl out of his life, and ignores her subsequent overtures. The scene that follows between Caligula and the girl in her room, is horrifying to watch. The sadist's eyes never leave the girl alone; he forces her to drink the brandy, forces her to listen to his filth, the while playing with her cat with a horrifying suggestion of controlled brutality. At school the final exams. have started, and for Jan-Erik the strain of these and the urge to see the girl again becomes too powerful to resist any longer. But tragedy is to follow. Letting himself into her flat, he finds her dead in bed, and a crumpled Caligula hiding behind a curtain. The boy rushes away, broken and bewildered. The verdict of death is given as alcoholic poisoning; the "slut" has drunk herself to death.

In school the next day Vidgren, beside himself, screams out the truth that Caligula, the sadist, has killed the girl; then confronted with the leering school-teacher, he lashes out and hits him across the face. Expulsion follows, but the headmaster sees behind Caligula's mask and realises that the fault is mostly his. Vidgren leaves home in disgrace, and there follows a deeply moving scene, with the boy standing outside in the street and looking up to the lit windows of the school, watching his colleagues receive their certificates. They are getting the award for many years of toil, but his life has been ruined; a macabre touch is added to this scene when Caligula's smiling face appears in the window.

Completely broken, Vidgren returns to the girl's flat, after having turned down an offer from his friend Sandstroem to stay with him. Alone, he breaks down in a fit of sobbing. There is a knock at the door. It is a visitor—Caligula. With a plea for mercy the detestable weakling, now repentant, begs forgiveness. But Caligula has lost the last round. Free at last, completely sure of himself, no longer frightened of the man who so very nearly ruined his whole life, Jan-Erik slowly walks past the sobbing Caligula, down the stairs, into the open—into freedom. The film ends on a note of hope.

Only very delicate direction could skate over the considerable difficulties presented in the making of a film of this kind. Sweden can be congratulated on having produced a film which every adult filmgoer will appreciate. Superbly acted and beautifully photographed, this film is in a class by itself. The acting of Stig Järrel as Caligula, Mai Zetterling as the girl, and Alf Kjelling as Jan-Erik could not possibly be bettered, while Alf Sjöberg's direction is something of an object lesson to Hollywood. It takes courage and imagination to handle such a difficult subject as adolescence in its more complex and "unmentionable" aspects. *Frenzy* shows that unusual subjects need not necessarily be taboo, and that the Swedish cinema has come of age.

What is a Film ? asks Denis Myers

FILMS—Hollywood—Art—Fiddlesticks! What a lot of nonsense is talked by you and me and the intellectual no-brow and the simple "Millionaires' Row" front-seater and the not-so-simple Miss One-and-Ninepenny-and-back-at-the-end-of-the-queue you, and every one of the twenty million people who see, talk, dream and drug themselves with films every week.

What a lot of nonsense—particularly when you consider that it is doubtful if there is such a thing as a film, or if you prefer, a movie, a flick or a motion picture. For whatever you call it, and whichever way you look at it, whether in the somnolent, sleep-it-off state, the craning mustn't-miss-a-flicker-of-it mood of determination, the let's-make-a-meal-of-it-and-where's-that-ice-cream-cone-Maud routine, or the lay-your-head-on-my-shoulder-nine-pennorth-of-dark anæsthetic whichever way it is, what goes on the screen is really a piece of celluloid almost entirely surrounded by money. And the people who write direct and act in the studios that produce this piece of celluloid are of so minor a consequence that nine out of ten of you—yes, you, sir or madam—don't even know their names at the end of the performance.

Blinded by the neon lights, dazed by the pride with which Paramount or Warners or Metro or Fox present their latest eyelash flutterer, bosom-heaver, or Schaffner-tailored-hick-torso, you will believe that Barrymore is a good actor (that mouthing whiner!) that Bette Davis is incomparable (whereas she has yet to learn the earliest lesson of acting, repose), that Ann Todd is a new discovery (she has made one lucky picture and has yet to prove herself) that Sydney Box is Britain's greatest young producer (he's made one good picture and one flop), that Edward G. Robinson is a good character actor (he's turned into a grimacing type).

And thus you often miss the little "bit" players who often really do act. Writers? Yes, you know the name Vicki Baum, which was so cleverly baumed and boosted that you believed Vicki was a seriously acclaimed novelist—whereas in her own country she rates as literary a quality as Miss Ethel M. Dell. Composers? Cole Porter's name will ring a nostalgic bell, though I wonder how many of you will attribute half-a-dozen songs he never wrote to him? Chopin—oh yes, he's the fellow Cornel Wilde played, isn't he?

To cap all, you will come to me, or anyone else, and ask "What's a good picture to go and see?" I defy any of you to say you've never asked that question. And what nonsense it is! There's no answer. Would you ask someone "What's a good book to read?" What sort of answer do you expect to get?

If to the one question you could with equal truth answer: The Bible or Lear's Nonsense Rhymes, to the other you could in the same strain reply: The Marx Brothers' latest or Mayerling. Just as there is no such thing as a film, there is no such thing as a good film. It depends entirely on the individual. For let us forget this false premise that the cinema is a Great Art. It is a form, usually inartistic, by analytical standards, of entertainment.

If it succeeds in its first purpose, to make money, it succeeds in its second, to entertain. It is something made for a mass audience. to sit in a smoke-filled temple and worship at. It is not something made for the few cognoscenti to sit in wind-jackets and corduroys, or slacks and Bacall hair-don'ts, in some arty repertory cinema and search for hidden meanings, patterns, tempos, and other jargons to bandy over bad coffee and watery beer afterwards.

To one man, Betty Grable's legs make a good film. To another woman, Van Johnson's grin ; to a hep-cat, Benny Goodman's tootling ; to a swooner, Frankie's wails ; to a Mancunian, Formby's vacuity. Errata—to the Groupist, Orson Welle's obscurity.

And what about Hollywood? Hollywood is a suburb of Los Angeles. It is as much out of date as a generic term for the American film industry as Elstree is for the British. Look at the big companies that are miles from Sunset Boulevard. Burbank is not Hollywood, Universal City is not Hollywood, Culver City is not Hollywood. And who is it really talks to any tune in the motion picture business? The sunburnt seen-abouters at the Mocambo or the Brown Derby? No, my friends, these are merely the gilt frames on the pictures. The people who talk the golden tune are in New York, where the head offices of the big syndicates are. The golden industry is talked in Wall Street. The greatest artists have always died poor, but the big industrial names of the film business will always be wealthy. Draw your own conclusions.

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Of flesh and fantasy

by Richard Kayne

On the left—Salvador Dali, who directed a surrealist sequence in "Spell-bound."

IT will have been noticed that all films seem to be made in trends. Not so long ago we had the war film trend, and the trend of the Occupied Country, as well as the star-studded mammoth musical in the inescapable Glorious Technicolour. And at present we are passing through the trends of the psychological film (with a vengeance) and the "impossible woman" (by which I mean "There *never* was a woman like Gilda," or "There *never was* a woman like Mildred Pierce"—as if we need to be told).

But ever since the advent of the film there has been a steady flow of films, fantastic and surrealistic; and lovers of films which are just a little out of the ordinary are indebted to Frenchmen like René Clair and Jean Cocteau. Clair, like Disney, has the Midas touch: such films as *Le Million*, *A nous la liberté*, and *Sous les toits de Paris* prove it, while his later films, *The Ghost Goes West*, and *I Married a Witch*, consolidate it.

But while Clair has been prolific, Cocteau has so far given us only four films, although his genius has flourished amply in other spheres. *L'Eternel Retour*, recently seen in London, was widely acclaimed by British critics, and it will be interesting to see their reaction to his new film, a fairy tale for adults, *La Belle et la Bête*.

The public, for the most part, find fantasy mostly exasperating and usually incomprehensible, and not only do they attack it (as they attacked the paintings of Picasso) but it is dismissed as impossible, unintelligible and nonsensical. But many recent films do indeed deserve this: such a film was the stupid and tasteless *Sentimental Journey*. Fantasy is not for the producer, who is a dabbler and a dilettante, and must be taken seriously—introducing it, just for effect, into an otherwise normal film, can spoil or break the film.

Hollywood has recently been sending over films that can be collected under the term (given to them by a prominent American) Dream-stuff. In a recent article he said, "Wherever we turn we are faced with

movies, into which a dream is introduced ; and if we do manage to get away from these, Fantasy rears her three-cornered head. Once seeing was believing, but now, not only have we ceased to believe, but we would be willing to stop seeing as well."

Dream-stuff covers anything from the inevitable werewolves, cat people, tiger women and invisible men to *The Woman in the Window*, *The Picture of Dorian Grey*, *The Enchanted Cottage*, *A Guy Named Joe*, *Once Upon a Time*, and *It Happened To-morrow*. The above are all worthy of revival, as are also the two films directed by Julien Duvivier in which Charles Boyer starred ; namely *Tales of Manhattan* and *Flesh and Fantasy*. We have not yet seen *Dream Girl*, from the Broadway play with Betty Field, but no doubt it will be arriving shortly along with some more examples of the film fantastic.

A great deal of comment has arisen over the surrealist landscapes in Alfred Hitchcock's latest, *Spellbound*. These are meant to portray the subconscious mind of a soldier suffering from amnesia, and were designed by the Spaniard, Salvador Dali. The film is portrayed against an aural background, called *The Spellbound Concerto* (Could it possibly be called anything else in these days of Cornish Rhapsodies, Intermezzos in Blue and Concertos named after half the capitals of Europe, not to mention El Alamein and Arnhem !).

And Dali, who is the greatest surrealist artist of our time, and who has also made several films in France, is now to design backgrounds and landscapes for Disney. This combination of two of the greatest geniuses of this century ought to prove an interesting experiment, and the fantasy thereby engendered ought truly to be most illuminating. Disney, himself, has little to learn in the cult of the abstract, as his later films in this *genre* have shown. The animated fantasy has travelled a long way since 1934, when Berthold Bertosch made his famous *L'Idée* (which was, incidentally, banned in this country because of its violently communist outlook).

Fantasia is, undoubtedly, Disney's masterpiece to date, although certain scenes in his two South American ventures, as well as his complete *Make Mine Music* show that, by no means, has he yet reached the end of his road. *Alice in Wonderland* will see him once more in the realms of fantasy, and we must hope that it will be more suitable for children (who deserve more attention from him) than anything since *Bambi*.

The *comédie fantastique*, apart from the classics of the Marx Brothers, has seldom been seen, although *Hellzapoppin*, another screen classic, showed the immense possibilities of surrealistic humour.

The musical fantasy has been a rare offering to the public (perhaps it is just as well). *Lady in the Dark*, in which Ginger Rogers gave such an excellent performance, is the best example of this. Her former partner, Fred Astaire, breaks into fantasy in *Yolanda and the Thief*. His successor, Gene Kelly, danced in *Cover Girl*, with his own conscience, while in *Anchors Aweigh*, two short dream sequences were introduced into a conventional plotless musical. This Dream-stuff is rapidly becoming a habit ; I have an uncomfortable memory of Betty Grable, in a mink gown, surrounded by "dooks" and petty kings,

grappling simultaneously with several jewel-studded telephones, in time to two or three harps and a male choir.

Fortunately British film fantasy has not let itself run riot to quite such an extent. During the war there were a number of films of this kind. They include *Thunder Rock*, *They Came to a City*, *Dead of Night*, and Noel Coward's *Blithe Spirit*. This last film had a great success in France where, as *L'Esprit s'amuse*, it completely won the hearts of public and critics alike.

But where do we go from here? What new realms must we explore? Fantasy has come a long way from *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse* and the experiments of Georges Méliès, to *Here Comes Mr. Jordan* and *A Matter of Life and Death*.

I have heard about a "super epic fantasy" soon to come from Columbia Studios in which Rita Hayworth will play Terpsichore, the Muse of Dancing (*presumably there never was a woman like Terpsichore!*).

Surprisingly enough, no one has thought of making a film of H. G. Wells' *The Sea Lady*. Veronica Lake (so good in *I Married a Witch*) would make a wonderful mermaid in a René Clair fantasy based on this novel; and surely there must be some enterprising producer willing to get Louis MacNeice to write a scenario of his poetic drama, *The Dark Tower*? The film of fantasy is in any case an excellent medium for the poetic drama, and need not be an expensive experiment. May we hope that a British studio takes up the idea quickly, otherwise we may be having shortly a super epic in rhyming couplets, with Rita Hayworth as the Lady of Shallot (*There never was . . . !*!).

The Cinema in France

THE WORK OF ROBERT BRESSON

By ROY-ALEXANDER FOWLER

CHARENSOL, the famous French critic, remarked to me recently that of their five best directors, only one—Marcel Carné—was working in France. Of the others, René Clair and Jean Renoir are in America, Henri-Georges Clouzot is banned and Robert Bresson hopes to make a film in England. Robert Bresson is a name entirely new outside France, and, even there, his formidable reputation rests upon only two films. His is a remarkable career in that he started directing films with no previous film, stage or writing experience; he was drawn to the cinema because of what it is. In 1942, returning from imprisonment in Germany, and knowing a producer willing to back him in his experiments, he commenced searching for a story. Its frame he knew—he wanted it to have a Catholic background. The story he learned in a few lines from a monk who had told him of

convents in which pure young girls coming from their families joined with ex-criminals coming from prison. After a while, said the Dominican brother, no difference might be discerned between the girls.

On this basis, Bresson wrote the story and screenplay of a film called *Les Anges du Pêché* (The Angels of Sin) for which Jean Giraudoux wrote the dialogue. At first, the producers experienced some difficulty since the convent in which the story was set refused permission for it to be filmed. Although himself a Catholic and knowing what little chance he stood of working against the dictates of his church, Bresson continued his preparations and eventually succeeded in gaining the requisite permission.

In brief, the story of the film concerns itself with two young girls. Anne-Marie comes from her family, proud and basically seeking only a new experience. Thérèse has been released from prison: she shoots the man responsible for her imprisonment and comes to the convent merely to hide from the police. In spite of her faults, Anne-Marie takes on to herself the task of leading Thérèse into the path of righteousness: but the latter detests her and is instrumental in having her sent away from the convent. Nothing daunted, and now with humility, Anne-Marie returns. She is dying, however, and lives only to see her wish come true, for as the kneeling nuns pray for Anne-Marie, Thérèse is led away by the police, knowing that one day she will return not as a criminal but as a devout.

Les Anges du Pêché is, in most ways, an extremely beautiful film. Its story is, perhaps, a little rarefied (it's the sort of thing MGM-International goes in for and, indeed, I'm told they have bought the film for distribution here) but, although the story is credible, the film's main interest is that it concerns itself with showing not so much what happened as *why* it happened. This, Bresson shows entirely through his players. The mood is set by camera and lighting, the rhythm is governed by the director through his actors.

Recently Bresson and I had many delightful chats together in his archaic little apartment overlooking the Seine. Oldish young, with grey streaked through his hair, he possesses a creed for his films; his ideas, although not new, are, in many respects, rediscovered for the time. That he has had a chance to practise them is just one of the many wonders of the French cinema.

"'Pictures,' said a French painter, some time ago, 'are some colour assembled in a certain order,'" Bresson told me. "A film is a succession of pictures in a certain order and rhythm. It should, in the widest sense of the word, be 'musical'—in that each part is related to the others, and the end to the beginning. The cinema will, eventually, arrive at this stage—perhaps in fifty years, perhaps in a hundred. At present, this, let's call it the 'loi de la technique de la poésie' is in the background of films (if it's there at all): the story and players are in the foreground." This, you may say, is neither new nor neglected; in reality, however, one can develop this bare statement in two directions. One way leads to the *montage* concepts of Griffith, Eisenstein, etc., the other to the ballet-like play with people which is Bresson's method. Relating these ideas historically, one finds the technique



PHOTO
GUY REBILLY

Maria Casares as Helene in Bresson's "Les Dames du Bois de Boulogne."

most developed in, perhaps, Carl Dreyer's film, *La Passion de Jeanne d'Arc* and, more recently, in *Henry V* and the best moments of *Brief Encounter* (a film, incidentally, that Bresson admires tremendously). It will also be found in Jean Cocteau's *La Belle et la Bête*, for Cocteau has added a coda to Bresson's creed. "On imagine trop souvent la poésie comme une chose nuageuse. La poésie ne vient pas du flou ; c'est une chose précise. La poésie, c'est du chiffre."

If he were free to progress as he wished, Bresson would attempt to practise his ideas in a far more simple manner than hitherto. "Life is movement and action," he declares, "but action is not always life. Take the sculptures on the Arc de Triomphe : they are of movement, but not of life. Theatre is action and cinema is life. The blushing of a face, the beating of a heart is life. Movement is inside. Action should be left to the theatre and the cinema should attempt something closer to the real thing."

It is easily understood, therefore, how his attempts to get as near as possible to "the real thing" (and this does not mean merely plain realism, but what lies behind realism) make him a most exacting director. Everything in frame and on sound-track he seeks to make his own. "A film should be made before one comes to the studio." Every action is explained, every inflection given to an actor. (At the end of the day, the women are crying, the men are seething, but Bresson is said to get results.)

Yet, for all this attention to minute detail, his ideas call for a pre-occupation with the ensemble for which detail of reality is sacrificed. It is this that produces in his films a stylisation, what one writer has called "an anonymous vacuum divorced from any background of daily life." They possess a curious sense of belonging to themselves and of existing only as things in themselves. They come to the imagination like, as it were, things in the night. They linger, but as a pattern of light and shade: they are the purest combination of ballet and cinema yet seen.

After the considerable success of *Les Anges du Péché* recently, Bresson prepared his second film. For many years he had carried in his mind an eighteenth-century story by Didérot. It was this, in modern dress, with dialogue by Cocteau, that emerged as *Les Dames du Bois de Boulogne*. As much controversy raged over the story as the method of realisation. Jean and Hélène are two modern lovers who, due to Jean's decreasing affection, part. Hélène sets about avenging herself and follows the course of marrying off Jean to Agnès, an ex-danseuse, without him suspecting anything. Immediately after his marriage, Jean is told by Hélène of Agnès' past—"vous avez épousé une grue. Elle était danseuse, mon cher." He, so wounded, almost despairs, but realises eventually that he loves his wife whom he begs to stay with him. The film is important. It is a vast development from *Les Anges du Péché* and, because more profound, is, perhaps, less satisfying.

It should be said, too, that it was made in face of many difficulties. Started a short time before the liberation of Paris, it had to be suspended for several weeks until things settled down again. Shooting could often take place at night only, since electricity was strictly controlled. Most important, the role of Jean was written for Alain Cuny (who plays Gilles in *Les Visiteurs du Soir*) but who subsequently proved to be unobtainable, the part being eventually played by Paul Bernard. At transferring Bresson's theories from words into film, however, *Les Dames du Bois de Boulogne* is remarkably successful. Instrumental in the process was Philippe Agostini, now acknowledged as France's most brilliant cameraman, who, in spite of certain differences with the director, accomplished his most outstanding work to date on the two Bresson films.

Now Bresson wants to make a film in England and has already started preliminary talks with a British producer. He has completed a script which his producers would like him to make in colour but, Bresson explains that it is impossible to make a satisfactory drama in colour at present. He would like to make a colour film; he feels that film colour is, at the moment, very bad. With present methods preventing the subtlety he envisages, he feels colour should be used consciously knowing that it is bad. It should be rough as in a child's comic-paper. Picasso has the solution, he feels. With a bad pencil and with very simple effects, he is able to express himself and create things of beauty. It is to be hoped that Robert Bresson is able to make his film over here for, in spite of the mass of brilliance at the top of to-day's British cinema, there is always room for more.

HOME THOUGHTS ON FILMS FROM ABROAD

By Henry Marshall

WITH the screening of the new Swedish film *Frenzy* at the Academy my mind goes back to the foreign films some of us were lucky enough to see in pre-war days. I think the great error we made was to rate the foreign-speaking product too high and the English-speaking film too low. Some of the French and Russian film were magnificent. But so were *The Grapes of Wrath* and *Winterset* and quite a few others. English documentaries were proverbially first-class, and among the chaff of Hollywood a few ears of wheat survived. But the wave of intellectual snobbery that followed the sub-titles submerged the fact that the average foreign production was little better than the average British or American. True, even the routine Russian picture had fine photography, but its American counterpart had excellent acting and a rattling good pace. When it comes down to it there is little to choose between *Abus de Confiance* (Danielle Darrieux) and *Love on the Run* (Joan Crawford). But in the queue at the Academy these things are forgotten.

Some of the average French pictures did creep over here now and then, but they came and went unheralded and, mercifully, unsung. Far more interesting were the films of countries other than France and Russia. There was *Fredlos*, for instance, a Finnish melodrama, distinguished by some fine camera-work and elemental emotions. There were the two first Dutch pictures *Dood Water* (semi-documentary) and *De Kribbebijter* (adapted from a well-known Dutch play). Even between these two films a distinct improvement could be seen, though both suffered from having leading actors with strongly developed stage technique. In contrast to this there was a Jugo-Slavian film called *Reka* acted by players who seemed to take naturally to the film medium. Here again there was some fine photography.

All these pictures scored when they showed us their own countries and their own way of life. The best American films are the ones that show us America—the real America—not some synthetic studio confection. The same principle applies to any film industry—however young and raw. It is the native that rings true, the imported that is false.

When the sexual storm over *Ekstase* had died down, what was left? A beautifully told story of two Czechs in love. *Hortobagy*, with all its faults, showed us something real—a way of life that was threatened when the film was made, and is now dead—but a way of life that was essentially Hungarian. The Csikos and their thundering herds were real enough, and we caught the magic and poetry of reality from the tossing manes and wailing shawns.

The only people who never seem to have mastered film-making are the Spaniards. They made, without exception, the worst films in Europe. I stayed at Jerez de la Frontera in 1931 and saw pictures that defy description. The programme was changed nightly and English films that had been banned in England were a frequent attraction. One turgid concoction starring Fay Compton, and set in a lighthouse, had been severely frowned on by Lord Tyrell—I could not imagine on what grounds, unless it was its dullness (which was monumental). Most non-Spanish pictures were dubbed, and to hear Laurel and Hardy speaking in pure Castilian was a startling experience.

When the native product was screened the Spaniards gave their opinion of it in no uncertain fashion—by shouting, making cat-calls, knocking over their chairs, and running up and down the aisles (Some English pictures shared this reception, including the lighthouse epic—poor Fay Compton!). The Spanish films were usually adaptations of modern Spanish stage comedies and about as filmic as so many bath-buns. It never occurred to the Spanish film directors to utilise their splendid landscapes, their peasant traditions, and their magnificent history. In this field they could have run rings round Hollywood and everyone else.

We have had to wait until quite recently to see any Mexican films—but what gems they were! The lovely lyrical *Portrait of Maria* and the Steinbeck masterpiece, *Forgotten Village*. The Mexicans did with Mexico what the Spaniards failed to do with Spain—capitalised their country, its life and its people, and made film history in doing so. The Swiss have done the same thing with *Marie Louise* and *The Last Chance*. Again a young industry scores enormously with its first two pictures—or at any rate its first two pictures to be distributed abroad. The lesson of Mexico and Switzerland cannot be ignored.

What has happened to the film industries of other countries? India and Egypt are making headway, but nothing, apparently, acceptable to an occidental audience. Japan once made pictures, but that was before the atom bomb. The Soviet Union managed to produce a few masterpieces (including the superb Mark Donskoi *Gorki* trilogy) even among war-time potboilers; we hope for great things from the Russians in the future. Some of the exiled French directors are going home—perhaps the Californian rot has been stopped before it is too late. Other European countries are making films again. The war is over, and the film industry the world over is looking forward.

Meanwhile we have had the Swedish *Frenzy* at the Academy. Swedish silent films were excellent. Few of their talkies were shown over here—the last one in 1937—so perhaps *Frenzy* is the forerunner of good things to come. If the Hollywood-Rank tie-up goes according to plan, what is best in French film-making—its native roots—may be torn out in a bid for the world market. And if so it will be a black day for France. Only those countries temporarily beyond the tentacles of American capitalism as far as films are concerned will be able to make pictures that reflect their own true selves and their traditions. At the moment Sweden is one of those countries. I went to the Academy with great expectations. And was not disappointed.

"Mr. Balcon's Young Gentlemen"

The work of five
Ealing Directors

Discussed by

JOHN K. NEWNHAM

WHEN the B.B.C. commentator, Roy Rich, referred in a recent broadcast to "Mr. Balcon's Young Gentlemen," he must have set quite a number of people wondering just what was meant by this. Michael Balcon's policy of giving youth its chance is by no means new. Throughout his long career as a producer he has consistently given opportunities to young people, entrusting them with responsible jobs at ages which in most walks of life would be considered immature.

By doing so he has always surrounded himself with enthusiasm and initiative, and it helps to explain why so much that comes from a Balcon-run studio has a touch of freshness and originality. Balcon himself is always full of new ideas and eager to experiment. He is also open to new methods and suggestions. The combination works out very well. Now and then, perhaps, an idea will not pan out as well as was hoped, or a young man's enthusiastic ideas will not be practicable. But the balance sheet shows an overwhelming credit balance in favour of his policy.

Go behind the scenes at Ealing Studios, where Michael Balcon is production head, and you will find these young men in every department—boyish-looking 35-year-old Hal Mason in the important position of general manager of the Studios, 30-year-old Michael Relph as art director and associate producer, 38-year-old Eric Williams as chief engineer and technical supervisor, 35-year-old Gordon Dines as head camera-man. So it goes on throughout the departments. Yet the majority are veterans, in spite of their youth, and have worked their way up from humble beginnings in their teens.

It is an interesting point that Balcon, although giving opportunities to young men (his latest scheme is a "school" for new writers in the studio), is not iron-bound in his belief that it pays to give good jobs to youth exclusively. He remains faithful to his old employees, many of whom have been with him throughout his film producing career,

Right—

Harry Watt.

Left—

Basil Dearden.



following him from one studio to another. They have grown up with him. And if a centenarian approached him with a good idea, he would be as eager to listen to him as if he were a twenty-year-old.

However, it was to the young people in general at Ealing that Roy Rich referred, and in particular to the studio's team of directors. Out of the six on contract to Ealing, five are under the age of forty, and of those five, only one came to Balcon with an established reputation. The others have reached director status by passing through other departments.

The five "under-forties" are Basil Dearden, Charles Crichton, Charles Frend, Robert Hamer, and Harry Watt. Harry Watt joined Balcon with a big reputation, as a documentary ace, and the man who had made *Target for Tonight* (a picture, incidentally, which Harry is now thoroughly tired of hearing about!).

Basil Dearden, at thirty-five years of age, is the latest of this little group to have fulfilled Balcon's expectations. He has emerged as a leading film-maker with his direction of one of Ealing's most successful pictures to date, the record-breaking *The Captive Heart*. No flash of genius propelled this gingery-haired young man to success. He has had a long and varied film and stage career before reaching his present position, and the excellence of his direction is based on all-round knowledge of his job.

His whole life has been a story of success won against odds. His father lost his life while crossing the Channel during the First World War, leaving a widow with a family of six young children to bring up. They lived in extreme poverty, and Basil Dearden went to work as an office boy in a London insurance office as soon as he was old enough.

The family had a theatrical background. Three of the children went into the theatre, and Basil followed them, "walking on" with the Ben Greet Shakespearean Company during his holidays and then joining the repertory company at the old Grand Theatre, Fulham, as assistant stage manager.

After a year behind the scenes he joined Ben Greet and toured America with his company, playing one night stands of Shakespearean plays. On his return to London he met Basil Dean and for the next five years acted as his production manager in all his theatrical enterprises. When Dean switched his interest to films and built Ealing Studios he took Dearden along with him.

Dearden proceeded to learn about films from A to Z, starting at the bottom; he was an assistant director when Michael Balcon took over the studios in 1938. Balcon promoted him to associate producer, and later on Dearden graduated to directing by co-directing the Will Hay comedies with Will Hay himself.

This "working to a formula" directing gave little opportunity for individuality, but Dearden showed himself possessed of a sure touch and a personality of his own, and these Will Hay comedies have been followed by a series of widely and different experimental subjects such as *The Halfway House*, *They Came to a City*, the hearse sequence in *Dead of Night*, and then *The Captive Heart*. He is now preparing the screen version of Helen Simpson's *Saraband for Dead Lovers*.



Valerie White and director Charles Crichton on the set of the new Ealing film dealing with juvenile delinquency, "Hue and Cry."

From the pictures it can be seen that he had shown himself, so far, to excel in subjects rather than personalities, but the human touches in *The Captive Heart* gave a strong hint that he is developing into a director who can handle pictures possessing great emotional appeal.

Sincerity and realism might be said to be the key-note of Charles Frend's directing. He has a strong leaning towards pictures with open-air settings, such as *The Foreman Went to France*, *San Demetrio, London*, *The Return of the Vikings*, and *Johnny Frenchman*, and is at present making a film of Sheila Kaye-Smith's *Joanna Godden*, which is set on the Romney Marshes.

Frend, now thirty-seven, comes from the cutting-rooms and has been in the film business since leaving Oxford. At Oxford he had already made up his mind to take up films as a career, and began by getting atmosphere as film critic on the *Isis*. The change-over from silents to talkies gave him his first chance to meet a screen personality when the late Donald Calthrop officiated at the opening of talkies at a local cinema. Frend interviewed him, and later on it was Calthrop who put him in touch with B.I.P. Studios at Elstree, where Frend went to learn the business of cutting.

The first time he got his name on the credit titles was with *Arms and the Man*, and afterwards he went to work with Alfred Hitchcock on *Lord Camber's Ladies*. Later on he became a fully fledged film editor when he cut for Hitchcock at Gaumont-British. Joining the G.-B. staff, he came under the wing of Balcon and became one of his

ace cutters, editing such films as *Secret Agent*, *Sabotage*, and *Young and Innocent*; then for M.-G.-M.-British he cut *A Yank at Oxford* (under American expert Margaret Booth), *The Citadel* and *Good-bye Mr. Chips*.

On the outbreak of war he helped with the editing of *The Lion Has Wings*, then cut *Major Barbara*, and rejoined Balcon at Ealing, where he progressed from the cutting-rooms to direction for the first time with *The Big Blockade*, a war-time documentary with fictional characters, on which Cavalcanti was associate producer. Frend is tall, good-looking, serious. He speaks quietly, never gets temperamental, and is obviously a British film name to watch.

Robert Hamer and Charles Crichton are both somewhat in the embryo stage as directors, but they have already shown originality and have scored successes with their first directorial efforts. Hamer, thirty-five, became a director more by chance than anything else. He went to Ealing as an editor in 1940, and soon became an associate producer. It was in this capacity that he worked on *San Demetrio, London*. Charles Frend fell ill, and rather than hold up production, Hamer took over direction of one or two of the sequences. By a strange coincidence, a similar thing happened when he was associate producer on *Fiddlers Three*. Harry Wyatt completed the picture, then went off to Australia to make *The Overlanders*. A few weeks later it was necessary for two or three *Fiddlers Three* scenes to be retaken, and once again Robert Hamer stood-in as director.

Although these two incidents were not wholly responsible for his promotion to directing, they helped considerably in demonstrating his possibilities to Balcon. He was given his chance with the mirror sequences in *Dead of Night*, after which he became a fully-fledged director with *Pink String and Sealing Wax*. His interest is mainly in crime stories, and crime will once again be his subject for *It Always Rains on Sunday*, his next production. In the twelve years he has been in films (he went straight from Cambridge to Gaumont-British, where he began as clapper boy), Hamer has spent most of his time in the cutting rooms, first as an assistant with London Films, and then as editor of such films as *Vessel of Wrath* for Erich Pommer.

As with the other "young gentlemen of Ealing," Charles Crichton has learned his job from the ground floor upwards, and is another of the cutting-room boys to have made the grade as a director. An inveterate pipe-smoker, imperturbable and thorough, Crichton has so far shown himself to be a versatile director whose work falls into no set category. He was born in New Brighton in 1911, and decided while still at Oxford to take up films, which he did as an assistant in the cutting-rooms at Denham, working on *Things to Come*, *Elephant Boy*, *Prison Without Bars*, *The Thief of Bagdad*, and other pictures. Joining Ealing as a cutter, he found himself making documentary shorts instead, a job which was largely editing, then full-length story-documentaries, including *For Those in Peril*, the story of the men of the Air-Sea Rescue Service, and *Painted Boats*, which dealt with Britain's canals. The hilarious golfing sequence in *Dead of Night* followed. It was a striking contrast to his previous pictures.



Roy Kellino, cinematographer, and director Charles Frend, during the making of "Johnny Frenchman."

Now he is handling something which is again quite different from anything he has done before, a picture called *Hue and Cry*, which is a trifle difficult to describe until one sees how his handling of it has turned out. Its basic story concerns a bunch of young Londoners who read a blood-and-thunder thriller in a boys' magazine, and then find themselves involved in the real-life adventures described in the story. It is a comedy and also a thriller; but more than that, it delves into the world of fantasy. It will be interesting to see how Crichton has dealt with it.

I have left Harry Watt until last simply because I imagine that by this time most people know enough about him to need little introduction. Whereas the other young men who are directing Michael Balcon's films have all become directors under the ægis of Balcon, Harry Watt arrived at Ealing with the reputation of being one of Britain's foremost documentary directors. But it is Balcon who has turned him into a director of feature films, covering a far wider sphere.

From a very humble job with the old G.P.O. Film Unit—his first task, he avers, was to whitewash corridors—Watt won fame with his direction of *North Sea*, *Night Mail*, *Britain at Bay*, *Squadron 992*, *Britain Can Take It*, and the never-to-be-forgotten *Target for Tonight*.

When he signed a contract with Ealing, his first feature was the semi-documentary style, *Nine Men*, and after this he plunged right into a full-scale fictional Tommy Trinder musical, *Fiddlers Three*. It was not his happiest effort, and he reverted to the semi-documentary immediately afterwards by going to Australia to direct *The Overlanders*, which has fictional characters in an authentic story of Australia's mass movement of cattle from the Japanese-threatened areas to safer parts two thousand miles inland.

Watt, thick-set, genially-explosive, adventure-minded, has ambitions to see the world with a movie-camera. He may go back to Australia for another picture, but if not he wants to go somewhere overseas. His first film-making experience was making a picture out of long strips of celluloid in the cutting-rooms. Now he wants to go to the other extreme and remain out-of-doors (he hasn't forgotten that his one 100% studio production was *Fiddlers Three*!).

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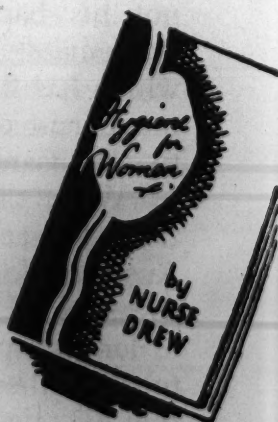
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The Voice of the People

is examined by Gerard Young

AMERICA has complained about *Henry V*. It is a brilliant film, they say, but they would enjoy it to a greater degree if they understood more of the dialogue. This is not a new form of criticism. Ever eager to speak their minds with blunt clarity, Americans have always been pointing out this linguistic stumbling block to British headway in U.S. cinemas. Producers here have taken little notice. Our films weren't primarily intended for American audiences.

This American criticism isn't mere tittle-tattle. It is printed. Weekly in *The Motion Picture Herald*—leading film trade publication—there are two pages of red-blooded comment by exhibitors on the films they have been showing. This feature is called "What the picture did for me," and we could benefit by a similar forum in this country. There is no pulling of punches, *e.g.*, an Ohio manager on *Jane Eyre*: "The inclusion of Orson Welles in the cast was poison," or on *The Woman in the Window*: "I died with this one." I mention these to show there is no bias in favour of Hollywood.

Now listen to two different managers on British pictures: *Spitfire (The First of the Few)* "This story of the designer of the Spitfire airplane received fairly good response from our patrons. The English accent makes it hard for some people to understand the dialogue."

In Which We Serve. "Didn't do a thing for us, in fact played to below average and the weather wasn't the whole trouble. Had complaints that they couldn't understand the conversation. Really good picture, but we didn't do well on it."

Those are fair comments. There have been many like them. No objection is taken to British direction, story, photography or acting, but only to the indistinguishable, and often undistinguished, dialogue. *The Way Ahead* received a similar rap. Critics of *Henry V* even suggest English sub-titles to assist American comprehension! It is a problem that needs an answer.

The answer that many of you may indignantly provide is not a constructive one. You are probably saying: "If we have to put up with American accents in their films, then they must get used to English accents in ours." But I don't think it is a case of having to put up with their accent. Though it has different intonations to ours, we can understand it.

The American voice, by some lucky vocal chance, seems to be the easiest to record, either on disc, sound film or through radio. The full measure of their speech, the way in which they project their voice, is completely discernible to English ears. Whether we like their accent or not is another and more personal issue. The point is, we do understand what they say. Their grumble, on the other hand, is that many of our screen voices are unintelligible to them. This takes the gilt off otherwise good British pictures.

By unintelligible, they mean they cannot hear what is said. This is traceable to many causes. I'll suggest three: (1) Elocution teachers

who continue to produce the "Oxford" accent standard of English ; (2) Sound recording ; (3) British film directors who make the players gabble, under the false impression that this quickens the film's tempo.

These three causes can be broken down and analysed further. Take the accent problem first : the Americans do not seriously object to the British voice, it is only the accent that confuses them. That particular accent which is not the voice of the people, is the one prevalent among so many actors and actresses. It was once described to me by a friend in Hollywood as "sounding as if they were speaking with a mouthful of hot potatoes through a tin can during a fog."

Because we are the most class-conscious country in the world, and because the way we speak is the one all-important clue to the class to which we belong, this accent—the "La-di-da" or "Oxford" accent—appears to be the accepted one for a stage or screen career. Dramatic academies, stage schools, private elocutionists all do their best to destroy the characteristics of their pupil's native speech and adapt it into the standardised, colourless "fraughtfully decent" English.

American audiences, with their ear tuned to the deeper, more gutty voices of their countrymen, resent the unintentional pomposity and anæmia of these particular English tones. But when they get a good English voice, one with timbre, one that has Anglo-American qualities, they are unstinted in their praise.

They have enjoyed the straightforward, unaffected London voice, blended slightly with an American vigour to become the International voice ; those London voices of Claude Rains, Ronald Colman, Clive Brook, Herbert Marshall, George Sanders, Richard Greene, George Arliss and H. B. Warner, which they have used to advantage in their own productions. Other former Londoners have provided them with good, steady, unaffected voices, understandable throughout the States actors such as Donald Crisp, Lionel Atwill, Roland Young, Victor McLaglen, Reginald Gardiner and Reginald Owen.

Nothing is fundamentally wrong, therefore, with the British voice on the screen except that, in English studios, we should remove from it that "hot potato," that thin delivery and that "Oxford" accent. Any good British voice, reduced to its natural tones, is acceptable to American ears. The faint lingering of dialect makes it even more attractive to both nations, as instanced by Brian Aherne (Worcestershire), Robert Donat (Lancashire), David Niven (Angus), Ray Milland (Wales), Errol Flynn (Ireland), and Charles Laughton (Yorkshire).

Scottish and Irish speech are fully understood by American audiences, probably because they do not appear "affected" and are pitched in a lower and therefore stronger key than the English voice. The inclusion of more dialect might improve our films because, for one reason, it would show America that Britain is not entirely populated by "Society" on one hand and Cockneys on the other. And what Cockneys! Harry Ross, Cockney-born actor from Stepney, tells me that even *East End* audiences can't understand what English film "Cockneys" are saying.

Cause No. 2, the recording of the English voice is a technical problem which is gradually being solved by our sound men, notably Brian Sewell of Gainsborough Pictures. Lack of liaison, however,

between recordist and film actor still needs rectifying. An actor new to film work receives plenty of advice about how to act and how he is to be photographed, but rarely does anyone trouble to take him aside and instruct him about his voice. He may be told to "talk up" or "talk down," but that is all. He may hear his voice in the "rushes" next day, and squirm, but there's no one interested enough to tell him how to develop a good, pleasing tone.

In despair, some British actors persevere on their own. Eric Portman, for instance, has an excellent film voice, vigorous, decisive, and with a hint of Yorkshire in it. Portman thinks far more attention should be paid to the voices of film players, that equal care should be taken in casting a voice as in casting a face. He once said to me: "There is a quality of excitement in a good voice. It has enormous power of suggestion. Just think how every day you judge from a voice over the 'phone what sort of person you are talking to."

Other pleasing and natural British voices belong to such actors as John Mills, David Farrar, Tom Walls, John Laurie, George Carney, Leslie Dwyer, Michael Rennie, Harry Welchman, Edward Rigby, Walter Hudd and Stanley Holloway.

John Clements and Stewart Granger both have small "hot potatoes" in their mouths. James Mason's fine scowl would gain considerably in effect if it had a deeper voice behind it. And of some of our quite talented actresses I dare not speak. Though we like their looks, we must admit that most of them talk like precocious school-children.

Cause 3, the directors who force the pace of the dialogue provide the biggest problem of all. The trouble begins outside the film world. As a nation we speak quickly anyway. We mutilate our words, chopping off final syllables, reducing phrases almost to grunts. Men and women enter film work with this disadvantage. They are natural gabblers. It is this national trait, plus the high-pitched delivery of the English voice when untrained that produces certain accents unintelligible to Americans. Furthermore, our directors aggravate it. Perpetually accused by critics of being slow in direction, they mistakenly seek to hasten the plot by accelerating the dialogue. In dramatic moments, they have men yelling at ten to the dozen. Girls become incoherent in emotional scenes.

Think back, by contrast, on any American picture with pace. Remember, for instance, the tension of *Laura*, *Double Indemnity*, or *The Woman in the Window*. How calculated, how steady and audible were the voices of Edward G. Robinson or Barbara Stanwyck. That was good direction, coupled to a good script. Listen, indeed, to any good American actor and realise what slow strength his voice has.

Our directors could instil this same force into our films. To achieve this, they must take frequent trips round Britain and learn how people speak. They must use scripts written by men who write only for films and not by novelists being paid extravagant sums for bookish dialogue. They must overcome their class-conscious aversion to would-be film players who perhaps do not speak as "naicely" as they do. In these British voices in the rough will be found the diamonds that make real film stars.

Behind the Camera

WITH

BY

"Men of Two Worlds"

Ethel Fisher

AT long last *Men of Two Worlds* has reached the screen. Whatever its reception, it cannot be denied that to its makers, Two Cities Films, must go the credit of having given to the public a great Empire film.

Men of Two Worlds is unique in that, for the first time, one is given a picture of Africa as it is to-day and because it shows the African as he is. For once we do not see the Negro as bell-hop, shoe-shine boy, or figure of fun ; one is shown the modern, educated young African turning to the service of his race the best of two civilisations. By contrast, and this gives the story of the film its dramatic quality, one sees the old Africa, through the characters of Magole, the witch doctor, so brilliantly played by Orlando Martins, and Kisenga's mother, so tenderly rendered by Viola Thompson, with its superstition impeding progress.

But perhaps the most outstanding feature of the film as pure entertainment, is that fact that, for the first time, a Negro player is co-starred with a British actor. Eric Portman, as the English District Commissioner, and Robert Adams, as the African hero, Kisenga, share almost equal honours in the unfolding of the story. One is the complement of the other ; neither character would mean anything without the other.

Even during the shooting of the film, these two artists collaborated closely. In short, they really lived out their story. The views of these two actors are interesting. Eric Portman says : " I am thrilled with my part in *Men of Two Worlds* because it is the best since *49th Parallel* and because the whole of the film is greater than the part. Perhaps I should explain this. Actors are supposed to consider their own part before anything else. But we are human and some of us realise that, however good or effective a role may be, unless the story is good then, somehow, the part doesn't matter. There are scenes so unusual, so unexpected, that I felt a little afraid of them. That is good for an actor. Easy parts are, well—just easy. That is why, for me, *Men of Two Worlds* has been a great adventure."

Here are Robert Adam's views : " I should like to pay tribute to all those concerned in the making of this film because it shows the African working on a friendly, co-operative basis. Artistically, the film gave me the great opportunity for which I had been waiting—to portray the Negro as an educated, cultured man, whose achievements have gained him a position of respect and responsibility. To have played in *Men of Two Worlds* has been, for me, dramatic pioneering ; it was an opportunity to lay a foundation on which those who follow may build, and I am proud of having had the opportunity of appearing in this film."



Eric Portman as the District Commissioner,
and Phyllis Calvert as the Doctor, in
"Men of Two Worlds," directed by
Thorold Dickinson, and photographed by
Desmond Dickinson for Two Cities, 1946.

Made at a time when the war was at its height, when man-power, transport, materials, in the Colonies as in our own country, were almost completely given over to the winning of the war, shooting *Men of Two Worlds* in tropical Africa was a triumph over apparently insurmountable difficulties.

Two journeys were made to Tanganyika Territory ; the first as a preliminary survey to select suitable locations and to develop the story on the spot. On this occasion the film's director, Thorold Dickinson, one of Britain's top directors, was accompanied by the author, Joyce Cary. Dickinson met and talked at length with many mgangas, or witch doctors, good and bad. Witchcraft is still practised in certain parts of Africa and the dramatic conflict between Magole and Kisenga in the film is based on actual fact.

The second journey, commenced in 1943, consisted of the transportation overseas of a complete film unit. The trip was dangerous and difficult. A German U-boat took toll of the ship carrying the movie camera and film stock. The customs at Lagos took away the only still camera and mislaid it until the unit were on their way home again. And the journey of those members of the unit travelling with twelve tons of picture and sound-recording equipment by rail, road, river and lake, up through the Congo to East Africa, took three precious months, due to war transport difficulties.

And all the time the threatening rains were creeping ever nearer. Coupled with all these difficulties, to bring their story to life, the Two Cities unit had to hack their way through dense jungle, make their own roads, irrigation furrows, shooting the scenes with the sweating heat all round them.

The art director, Tom Morahan, had to work in reverse—destroy nature to achieve the required background, whereas in normal studio work he recreates his background. To get a simple four-seconds shot of a car travelling along a road, two hours of "artistic" hacking were required.

Research into the lives and customs of the peoples inhabiting the slopes of Kilimanjaro was another problem. Thousands of feet of native music and natural sounds were recorded. Tons of weapons, clothing, household goods, were bartered for, packed and shipped on the 10,000 mile journey home. Hundreds of photographs had to be taken of native huts and village settings for reproduction in the studios at Denham, for the shooting of the closer, dramatic action of the story.

The unit learned more about the trends of East African life in a few months than most people in a lifetime of living there, and the story that went before the cameras, dramatic as it is, would be excelled by the story *behind* the cameras in East Africa, if all of it could be told.

The return to England and the shooting of the remainder of *Men of Two Worlds* at Denham was not achieved without difficulties, either.

Filmed in Technicolor, *Men of Two Worlds* was faced at home with the shortage of Technicolor lamps, already war-worn beyond their normal span of life. The lighting for the Litun village, for example, needed 10,000 candle power, so shooting was worked out in sections and the lamps moved from place to place as they went along.

The African cast presented another problem. Eseza Makumbi, the girl from Uganda, specially brought to England to play Saburi, had gallantly given up school teaching in her native land to join the company, after Thorold Dickinson had interviewed hundreds of young women all over Africa. She had never faced a film camera before and had to become "acclimatised" to the studios generally. Ill-health, too, kept some of the players away for weeks at a time, necessitating a complete reshuffle of the shooting schedule.

However, as the District Commissioner says in the film: "No big job is undertaken without a mess." In spite of nearly three years in the making; in spite of all the ups-and-downs of shooting in the tropics and the tricks of Fate at home, *Men of Two Worlds* is a job of which everybody who had any part, however small, in its making can be proud.

It is a film which will thrill you; it will please your eye with its beauty of colour and the music, specially composed by Arthur Bliss, will take you into strange, new worlds. Its story deals with live, human people, portrayed by such favourites as Eric Portman and Phyllis Calvert, its stars, and outstanding Negro actors such as Robert Adams, Orlando Martins and Viola Thompson. As a piece of cinema-craft this film once again proves that Britain can turn out motion pictures which are, technically, second to none.

Robert Adams, who plays Kisenga in "Men of Two Worlds," discusses the script with Peter Noble, co-director with Adams of the Negro Repertory Theatre. Mr. Noble's book, "Films and The Negro," will be published in early 1947.



Two Hollywood Directors

By NORMAN FLOWERS

(1) Robert Siodmak ✓

A BACKGROUND of European film production is something not possessed by most American directors (more's the pity) and it is perhaps because of his early experience with the old Ufa company in Berlin that talented Robert Siodmak (born in Tennessee, of German parents) is to-day rapidly advancing into the very top class of Hollywood's imaginative directors, after having directed successfully in France a number of films starring Charles Boyer, Danielle Darrieux, Maurice Chevalier and others.

A wide range of productions has led him from heavy Emil Jannings stuff to frivolous Deanna Durbin musicals (although *Christmas Holiday* must be counted as one of the best Durbin films) but it is undoubtedly in the more sombre and psychological type of film subjects that Siodmak really comes into his own. It was perhaps natural enough that a director of his kind would gravitate to Universal; a company traditionally noted for its attachment to what may perhaps be described as the Teutonic Approach. And for Universal Siodmak created, among others, *Phantom Lady* and *The Suspect*, both of which displayed his peculiar talents to the very best advantage. In the latter film, he may be said to have performed a minor miracle in keeping Charles Laughton sufficiently under control so as to cause him to give one of his finer (and less mannered) performances; in the former, one particularly recalls the vivid scenes featuring that brilliant actor Elisha Cook, Jr. as the frenzied jazz drummer, and the general air of heavy suspense, a feature of all his films.

It was in a more recent production for R.K.O. Radio that the work of forty-five year old Siodmak became really prominent, and in this picture, *The Spiral Staircase*, he brought his imaginative powers into full play. Murder, he showed us, can still be a terrifying screen experience and not just everyday stock in trade of seven movies out of ten. Here, he rediscovered the terror of the Human Eye in close-up and cunningly took us into the very brain of the killer to see the poor afflicted creature (beautifully played by Dorothy McGuire) as he saw her—a literally mouthless thing. This awful moment could only be carried off successfully by a master of Siodmak's order. *The Spiral Staircase* showed this director to be the finest craftsman of his kind since Hitchcock took Hollywood by storm.

One looks forward with great interest to the future work of a man experienced in German, French, and American films, and whose best work, I am certain, is yet to come.



Gene Kelly and Deanna Durbin in Robert Siodmak's Universal film, "Christmas Holiday," from the novel by Somerset Maugham.



Charles Laughton, Molly Lamont and Dean Harens in Universal's "The Suspect," a film based loosely on the Crippen Murder, and directed by Siodmak, 1945.



Gregory Peck and Tamara Toumanova in "Days of Glory," dealing with the war on the Soviet frontier, directed by Jacques Tourneur, 1943.

(2) *Jacques Tourneur* ✓

JACQUES TOURNEUR, born in Paris, but an American citizen since he was fifteen, has never been a fashionable director and until recently was classified as a "B picture" specialist. Nevertheless, his mastery of screen technique has become increasingly apparent to discerning film-goers who lately have had the good fortune to catch up with some of those elusive little "cheapies" produced by Val Lewton for R.K.O. Radio, for whom Tourneur's best work has been done.

The Cat People was the first to jerk the small section of the cognoscenti which saw it, into registering enthusiasm for Tourneur's capabilities. Until then he had been chiefly remembered as a director of shorts and conventional second features for M.G.M. (such as *Nick Carter, the Master Detective*). Yet the fact that he was the son of a famous French film pioneer should have been sufficient preparation in the minds of filmgoers for something more than a mere display of directorial competence.

In that compelling little movie, *The Cat People*, he revealed an unusual flair for creating pulse-quickenings suspense, and even though he was hampered by cheap production and a script containing the normal run of second feature dialogue, he contrived to turn out a noteworthy contribution to the school of the macabre. Tourneur displayed particular facility in the use of sound in the achievement of eerie effects, such as the roar of the motor-bus at one tense moment, and the uncanny echoing sounds of the panther's growl in the deserted swimming-pool in another (a terrifying moment this). Later, with *I Walked With a Zombie*, he created a strange atmospheric picture, and this time he was rather better served with his script. This was a dark haunting film, with much of that rather rare quality, After-Appeal, and, incidentally, very little of that rather less uncommon quality—Box Office (if the comments of the GI's who walked out on it at the camp cinema where I saw it in Africa, were any criterion!).

More recently Tourneur has directed *Days of Glory*, with Gregory Peck, and *Experiment Perilous*, a picture which fared ill at the hands of many critics, although the more discriminating were quick to note its essentially adult qualities and technical distinction. He has not yet had an opportunity to show his merit with the really big subject he deserves, but I doubt not that he will soon find his rightful niche in the exclusive gallery of Hollywood's most distinguished film-makers.

The Publishers of FILM announce a new series of essays on the cinema and allied arts, called

Film Quarterly Books

The first will be a new essay by Frank Shelley, which won the Blackwell Prize at Aberdeen University in 1941.

It is called :

Stage and Screen Acting

It will appear in the autumn, and will be followed by

“The Art of the Marx Brothers”

by PETER NOBLE

I Hate . . .

RELIGION IN THE CINEMA

declares PETER NORTHCOTE

RELIGIOUS films are contemptible and unethical ; their ethics being ready-made and governed more by the dictates of the Vatican and Wall Street than they are by the Free Churchmen of Denham. And the boys of Wardour Street peddle the manufactured goods which are inspired by the "Holy Joe's" of an opposing faith. It's as though the Wardour Street fraternity were saying, "Take your choice ; free enterprise is healthy ; competition makes for better business and what matter if you deal at the joss-house of another so long as you buy *one* of the religious articles." David O. Selznick, in Hollywood, and J. Arthur Rank, over here, plan to make a film called *Mary Magdalene*. This colossal, extravagant, gigantic bit of biblical film-making bids fair to outshine even Mr. Pascal's last contribution to the Screen Spectacle. It is said that it will be the Screen Sermon to end all religious films, or perhaps that is too much to expect—that it will end them !

Looking back over the films of the last few years I am horrified to note the gratis publicity given to the old biblical fairy tales. Apart from tragedies (in more senses than one) of laboured pieces like *The Song of Bernadette*, *Joan of Paris*, and the *Keys of the Kingdom*, we have even suffered the appalling spectacle of a crooner "putting over" with apparent gusto this propaganda (see *Going My Way* and *The Bells of St. Mary's*) and a first rate psychological crime story being vulgarised and distorted to bring in a priest giving a murderer his blessings at the end (see *The Postman Always Rings Twice*).

Now I have nothing against the screen being used as a medium for propaganda. I consider that most of our best documentaries had an axe to grind, and some of the finest pictures produced, such as *Pasteur*, *Zola*, and *The Magic Bullet* (the life of Dr. Ehrlich) have all preached a scientific theory enobling and upholding the dignity of man, and not degrading the human species. By all means treat the film stories which are sponsored by vested interests and the Church as fairy tales if you like. View them as you were able to view *Arabian Nights*, *Jungle Book*, and *Elephant Boy* ; but recollect all the time that many of your neighbours in the cinema are swallowing the stuff whole. It is propaganda of the subtle and more virulent kind.

You may say, "Oh, I know what you are. You're one of these champions of free speech, who believes in any form of propaganda so long as it doesn't conflict with your own ideas." But, if this is your argument, it is surely quite false, for the number of filmgoers who are actual religionists is an infinitesimal one, and yet their point of view is being expressed on the screen continually by Reaction, with all the force and power at its command. For every excellent realist film like *Land of Promise* there are fifty or sixty which preach escapism, or fly



Ingrid Bergman as a nun, and Bing Crosby as a Catholic priest, in "The Bells of St. Mary's," directed by Leo McCarey, of "Going My Way" fame.

to the Church for a theme. Most of the film critics advise the public according to what they fondly believe the public wants ; only a few, like Richard Winnington in England, and Alistair Cooke in the States, have had the courage to attack the iniquitous Production Code devised by Will Hays, the former Hollywood Film Czar. Every advance production in the past has violated this code, which apparently only comes into action when there is a political angle.

The main religious line inspired by the Church is the same in the film world as it is in the political. Its form of action is anti-communist, and anti-socialist. Writing in the first issue of *Film Quarterly*, I pointed out that even that magnificent film *The Last Chance* was marred by the theological sequences, which all those liberal-minded cinema-goers (who refuse to believe, for instance, that only Roman Catholic priests suffered under the Nazi occupation) would find hard to bear. To this day the American Catholic Guild, chiefly controlled by bigotted and repressed spinsters, has inspired the boycotting, and even the picketing of certain films which they consider at all hostile to the Mother Church's way of life. And it is said that the Roman Catholic Church has had thousands of converts since the screening of *Going My Way* and *The Bells of St. Mary's*.

What is the underlying meaning of this entry of the clerical bhoys into the once "gay, immoral and flippant" cinema? The answer is that although the rising generation is no longer interested in religion, it is gullible enough to be hoodwinked by the clergy *outside* the medium

of the churches. The power of superstition has been great, and part of man's unfortunate inheritance for countless decades. And when the joss-house keepers realised that the red light outside their houses was no longer attracting the casual passer by, they utilised the most popular accepted form of entertainment in the world to-day to perpetuate it. The clergy and big business have long been on friendly terms and when the latter, in the form of trusts and banks, took over Hollywood, lock stock and barrel, with the exception of Chaplin and Orson Welles (for Ben Hecht and Charles MacArthur packed up and left), then was the moment to use one of the world's greatest industries as a medium for putting across once more the Old Wives' Tale. The power of the priest has lost its stranglehold on this country, but the priest, dressed up in film director's clothing, is another matter. Of course, not only are Mr. J. Arthur Rank and his associates innocents in this matter, but all sorts of progressive, thinking humans have been subconsciously saturated with old world superstitions and prohibitions since many men with liberal tendencies "respect the other fellow's point of view." Again, it is the unethical code of morals decreed by Respectability and the Old School Tie which makes men and women willing to stand aside when illiteracy and superstition are being preached from the housetops. It is, however, the Winningtons of cinema criticism who are changing the viewpoint of the world, and they are doing so by elevating the taste of audiences and not pandering to their basest instincts. And they are doing so by widening men's mental horizons. May they continue the good fight.

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PENDULUM POPULAR FILM SERIES

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(1) Mullally on Monopoly

AN intelligent young lady, a fairly regular attendant at film press shows, carved a passage recently through a solid mass of thirsty critics, grasped me firmly by the lapels, and proceeded to straighten me out on the subject of film monopoly. She had read, with growing impatience, a recent booklet in which I attribute most of the present-day frustrations of the British film industry to Mr. J. Arthur Rank. In the most forceful manner she tried to convince me that I was wasting my own time, which may or may not be valuable, and a considerable quantity of paper, "which certainly is valuable," on the acquisitive activities of Mr. Rank; that the influence of Mr. Rank on the British film had been fabulously over-stated; that, by and large, the British public got the films they deserved—no better and no worse.

This viewpoint interested me, not because it was new, but because it was expounded by a professional film critic, by someone whose duty it is to wish for only the best in films and to assume that her readers share that wish. Even if it were true that the public get the films they deserve—and I would hotly contest this proposition—this would be no excuse for complacency on the part of the professional critic. Surely the critic's main function is to raise the public's standards of appreciation, not to accept low standards with an air of patronising resignation.

To their credit it should be said that most film critics these days unreservedly accept this last proposition. Under the wartime inspiration of the *News Chronicle's* doughty Richard Winnington, whose criticism is sustained on a consistently high level of intelligence and integrity, the film columns of most national newspapers have freed themselves from a long subservience to Wardour Street and—with one or two glaring exceptions—have now become independent platforms for the free expression of praise or reproach. And, also to their credit, it should be said that most competent critics recognise the significance Mr. Rank. They know that all films—good or bad—share this in common: they cannot be made without money, studio space and distribution facilities, and they are far from convinced that Mr. Rank's hegemony in these spheres is a source of undiluted benefit to the British film.

For obvious reasons, the film critics—and, for that matter, everyone associated with the industry—find it easier to make up their minds on the vexed question of Mr. Rank's influence than does the average number of the film-going public. They are largely immune to the constant stream of high-powered ballyhoo put out by Rank's publicity departments and have more reliable evidence on which to base their judgment. As one of the founder-members, as it were, of the Anti-Rank League, I heartily welcome a recent publication by the Association of Cine-Technicians, which makes this evidence available to a wider public.

Under the title, "**Monopoly—The Future of British Films,**" Ralph Bond, chairman of the Association's executive committee, has

written a sixpenny pamphlet which packs into 30 pages all the relevant material on Rank's monopolistic activities and advances a sound formula for the healthy development of the industry. Most of us have given up hope that the Board of Trade will ever come to the rescue of Britain's independent film producers: the influence of high finance in high places would seem to be too considerable. But if the facts and arguments which Ralph Bond and others have to offer on the effects of film monopoly were given wide enough circulation among the ordinary film-going public, they might produce an agitation which would shake even the mighty foundations of the Kingdom of Rank on Earth.

F.M.

(2) Mullally's Alternative

FILMS—AN ALTERNATIVE TO RANK, by Frederic Mullally (Socialist Book Centre, 2/-).

Under the name "Henry Fullerton," Mullally has delivered many an anti-Rank peroration in the *Tribune*, and in his new booklet, which he describes as "a study of power and policy in British films," he offers his alternative to Rank's monopoly of the industry. He argues lucidly that greater scope for independent production is one way in which the stranglehold of monopoly can be broken. He adds however that if Rank agreed to grant studio space to independent British producers instead of to Hollywood producers (as would seem to be the case in the very near future) he would be cutting right across his own long-pursued policy of showing widely in his chains of cinemas the product of America. Mullally points out that Rank does this in order to prepare the ground for a break-through of the British product into the American market, but argues that, as Britain and Hollywood are essentially the bitterest of competitors, it is not likely that more than a handful of our films will find their way into the U.S.A., since Hollywood has the American distributors tied up neatly in celluloid.

In other words, says Mullally, we should stop concentrating on the American market and produce for Britain and the colonies specifically. In this way the number of our films shown in our cinemas will increase in the same proportion that the number of Hollywood films shown will decrease. And as Rank is producing films with one eye (or both) on the American market, he is likely to fall between two cinema stools. Here the author reminds us of the slump of 1937-38, which was the result of an identical policy on the part of British producers. Mullally favours protective government legislation, a square deal for the independent producer, the raising of the "quota" to fifty per cent. (but this only when we are making upwards of three hundred features annually, instead of, as now, between sixty and seventy).

Most of his arguments will be supported by the broad mass of intelligent filmgoers, and all who are interested in British films will find this hard-hitting booklet fascinating reading.

R.L.

JACK LINDSAY

reviews

Some Documentary Films

THERE is nothing in the films I am going to discuss here which is equal to *Land of Promise* by Rotha or *Cyprus Is an Island* by Ralph Keene, the outstanding items of last quarter. But there is a handful of highly competent documentary films on a lesser level, which have been made available during the last three months for use on the C.O.I. Mobile Film Units and through the Central Film Library. *The Last Shot*, with both the photography and direction by John Ferno (famous for his film *Spanish Earth*, dealing with the Spanish Civil War) and the script by Arthur Calder-Marshall, deals with the problems that the Dutch people had to face at the end of the war. Calder-Marshall's clear, unsentimental approach is happily married to Ferno's masterly directness in shooting, and rises at moments to strongly-felt and unfaltering-expressed warmth of sympathy with ordinary people in their trials. One of the problems of the documentary film is to get the sense of ordinariness and yet to reveal amid the casual movements the elements of love, courage, steadiness, brotherliness, which continually reveal themselves as the real human cement. Calder-Marshall and Ferno make this revelation with real tenderness and restraint; and out of the pictures of broken dykes, salt-ruined fields and shattered streets, and the unending weariness of hunger and enforced idleness, come the moments of sustaining human contact, unemphasised, but central. (Perhaps I feel a special emotion towards this film, as in 1944 all arrangements had been made for me to go out to the Netherlands to work with Ferno, when it was realised that with a private's rank I should be at too great a disadvantage when attached to the Dutch Forces.)

Another film which manages the human side with a pleasant unstrained warmth is *It Began on the Clyde*, directed by Ken Annakin for Greenpark. I wrote last time of Annakin's skill in dealing with nature and men at work in natural surroundings, but suggested that the structural development of theme might be strengthened. In *It Began on the Clyde* he shows that when he sets out to do it he can make as neat a story-telling film as the next man; he handles a large number of people with assurance and concision. In fifteen minutes length the excellently-composed script by Brian Smith sets the scene of the early war-period on the Clyde, with its strain on the workers and on the medical services, and gets us interested in what is going to happen to the shipyard-hand whose case the overworked doctor can't find time

to deal with in detail. The exposition, then, of how Scottish Emergency Hospitals were opened to civilians, including our man, and how the improvised idea broadened into the Clyde Basic Scheme, is sufficiently charged with emotional interest to get over with full effect. The film, in short, is a modest one, but in many ways a model of how to tell in personal terms the story of some general social development.

Man—One Family is a Ministry film directed by Ivor Montagu, with Prof. J. B. S. Haldane and Dr. Julian Huxley as scientific advisers. Animated diagram and humorous cartoon are mixed with newsreel sequences in an extremely vigorous discussion, which punches holes all over the theories of race-superiority and the fantasies of race-purity. It has been translated into sixteen languages, to be shown throughout Europe and help in breaking down the effects of prolonged Nazi propaganda. Its value for this purpose should be first-rate ; but the latest news is that the European section of the C.O.I. has ruled the film is not yet fit for consumption by the queasy stomachs of Europe !

Total War in Britain, produced and edited by Paul Rotha from the script of Ritchie Calder and Miles Tomalin, is a film-rendering of the White Paper on our War Effort. Rotha with his capacity to translate complicated social developments into expressive actuality-shots and scampering isotypes is the only man who could have packed such a full argument interestingly into such a summarised form.

Two useful types of Ministry films are *Achimota* and *It Might Be You*. *Achimota*, shot and directed by John Page, with a commentary written and spoken by Dr. Julian Huxley, shows the students at work at the co-educational Achimota College on the Gold Coast. As well as teaching the usual academic subjects, the College deals with the arts and crafts of its African folk, and tries to raise the level of agriculture. The music is recorded from the singing of Gold Coast choirs. *It Might Be You*, directed by Michael Gordon, is a capable reminder of the results of road-carelessness ; another of the narrative documentaries which manages to tell its story dramatically without over-emphasis and without sensationalism.

United Harvest, directed by Ralph Keene, deals with the topical question of Food—with the Hot Springs Conference, which tried to draw up a world plan for agriculture and for the defeat of malnutrition everywhere. But it seeks to escape gaseous generalisations by bringing the question down to earth—by telling the story of some soldiers coming back to Britain, seeing the half-starved kids on a French railway station, talking with an UNRRA man, arguing about things in England. One goes back to his farm and finds that a Plan did work in Britain during the war to give a huge lift to agricultural production ; another goes back to his factory, and tries to explain what he feels he's learnt : that world-prosperity cannot be stable while the food-producers of the world are treated as an inevitably-depressed class of workers. As I wrote the script myself I cannot make any comment on the success or failure of getting all this across ; but as the film is going on the Odeon circuits, with Ginger Rogers, it looks as if it will get round and you'll be able to judge for yourself.

The Erudition of James Agate

By OSWALD FREDERICK

One usually expects a film critic to write about films, and in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred that modest expectation is realised. In fact, if the critic didn't confine himself to dealing with the current celluloid entertainment he would very soon find himself in hot water with his editor. But there seems to be one exception, Mr. James Agate, of course, who is the hundredth case. He, it appears, can get away with anything. If he chooses to fill his film column in *The Tatler* with a dissertation upon golf, he does so, and when he has said all he has to say for the moment and there is a little space left over, he might deign to mention a film or two which he has recently seen. Since he is the inimitable James Agate, I for one, have no complaint to make against this form of film criticism.

Ordinarily, perhaps, this sort of thing might annoy me, particularly if Mr. Agate were the film critic of *The Observer* or *The Sunday Times*, to which two journals I often refer. But since he writes for *The Tatler*, a periodical that I rarely see, I don't mind at all, and while C. A. Lejeune and Dilys Powell continue to deal with the new films in London's two best Sunday papers, I am more than content to see James still airily contributing his erudite articles to *The Tatler*, particularly so since his new book has given me some idea of the sort of thing he writes about in it.

The book is called **AROUND CINEMAS** (Home and Van Thal, 15/-), and consists of reprints of some of the film articles he has been writing regularly since 1928 (and on and off since 1921). I have no doubt at all that had he reprinted them all, we should have had quite a lot of straightforward criticism of the many films which have been shown here since he started reviewing, but since he states in his preface that these essays were chosen "not according to the importance of their subject-matter, but according to my liking for what I have written," it is to be expected that the more diverting and witty of his articles were the ones selected, even if a great many of them only barely touch upon the films he originally set out to notice.

For years I have read *The Daily Express* on a Saturday merely for his book reviews, and for some time I have glanced at *The Sunday Times* column for his dramatic criticism. While I shall never, in future, pass a copy of *The Tatler* without at least scanning the Agatian essay, it will not be to read about the films but to see if he is in the same mood he was in when he wrote most of these articles here, since I admit that I find him quite the most delightful humorist now writing in this country, while his fund of knowledge concerning almost everything and everybody makes fascinating and highly entertaining reading.

Not, mark you, that he digresses to such an extent that films are never mentioned at all; this book is a big one, and even with his anecdotes about Sarah, his early sex life and his harness ponies, there is still

quite a lot about the pictures. In fact he manages to mention some 113 different productions, while quite a number of those are dealt with at length. Neither is he always scathing, as one might expect of a man who knew Sarah Bernhardt and the English theatre in their respective heydays. Over many films he waxes quite enthusiastic, while the number of times he indicates that such and such a film is the finest he has ever seen would perhaps become monotonous had he not early drawn attention to these lapses himself, mentioning gaily that "he must have thought so at the time."

To a great many people, reviews of the films of twenty years ago will have little or no interest at all, but I find them absorbing. Most of the milestones of the industry, if not actually written about, are at least written *around*, and on occasion Mr. Agate deals thoroughly, and extremely capably, with new releases, notably *Journey's End*, *Broken Blossoms*, *All Quiet on the Western Front*, *The Blue Angel*, *Lost Horizon*, *Citizen Kane*, *Pygmalion* and various of the Chaplin films.

Quite often he compares a picture with the novel or play from which it was adapted, usually, and I think justifiably, to the film's disadvantage (as in the case of *Hangover Square*, which Hollywood adaptation made all other criminally unfaithful adaptations look like fidelity itself). He is also highly expert at picking out directorial gaffes, two of which are worth noting here.

"... why, if the natives want to keep the monster on the other side of that wall, they should build a door big enough to let him through. And why he doesn't climb it, anyhow" (*King Kong*).

"And will somebody please tell me how they got the grand piano along a footpath on which only one person can walk at a time with rope and pickaxe and with a sheer drop of three thousand feet or so?" (*Lost Horizon*).

In this mood he does not always confine himself to films. On one occasion, dealing with *Kameradschaft*, Pabst's famous film about mining, Mr. Agate writes of a fellow-critic, "In fact, Mr. Carroll is so much moved that he bursts into French: 'Les Allemandes! Incroyable!' For myself what is *incroyable* is that my old friend should have believed all these miners to be *females*!"

I like my Agate when he is writing in this way, but I like him even more when he tells us that in 1919 he holed Prince's Golf Course in 75. "I would have put an exclamation mark after this figure," he says, "had I not been afraid of the printer recording my score as 751." Later on, in what is quite his most outrageous digression, he remarks, "It was the first time I had been on a really big liner, and I felt a sudden need for Mr. Arnold Bennett." Again, "At the Tivoli there is something called *Delicious*, in which Miss Janet Gaynor falls in love, strange to say, with Mr. Charles Farrell!"

Around Cinemas is so diverse that at times I felt I was reading yet another volume of the numerous *Egos*. Like those famous diaries, each separate essay is dated, not necessarily by its subject matter, but by the italicised day, month and year of its first appearance in print. Thus the book becomes a valuable reference work, telling us, within a day or two, just when each film was first shown in London. The author also reviews new books on films and the cinema, such as Paul

Rotha's *The Film Till Now* and Pudovkin's *Film Acting*, and even tells us about some of the super-cinemas he visits (like the monstrous Babylon he happened upon at Brixton).

Throughout the book one encounters Mr. Agate's periodical references to the talkies, a development he made no bones about condemning in the late 'twenties, and to which he was not entirely won over after almost all the films he saw had become audible. Gradually, however, he began to accept (if not passively) the new order, and for a time, in these pages, he makes little reference to the innovation. At the end of 1929 we find him, after hearing "The Lost Chord" on the cinema organ, announcing that "in the bosom of one cinema fan there is more joy over chords that are lost than over tongues that are found." But it is 1936 before he spares us more than a few words on this subject again, beginning an article, "Until last week there were four absolute silences—Outer Space, the Grave, the Sphinx, and Charlie Chaplin. Then, on Tuesday, February 11th, 1936, the number of these silences was reduced to three, since—in his new film at the Tivoli entitled *Modern Times*—Chaplin's voice was heard for the first time." He then goes on to outline the best argument I have read on why Charlie Chaplin should never have spoken.

Around Cinemas is altogether a delightful, wayward and entertaining book, and the title is the best Mr. Agate could have chosen, in view of his many meanderings away from the actual business of reviewing. But no matter how far he strays he is never dull. On one occasion, after reading the whole of an article all but the last couple of lines or so, I was beginning to wonder how on earth he would justify here his title as film critic, when I encountered the following: "As this is a film article, let me say that last night I saw a film called *Asphalte*, which, however, appeared to be about something else, like this article." If you like to read writing of a high order, get this book at once.

Although Orson Welles has been a "name" in America for a good many years, and although it was as long ago as 1941 that he burst upon a somewhat startled world with *Citizen Kane*, it is only now that the first complete book on this young genius has been published. This is **ORSON WELLES**, by Roy Alexander Fowler (Pendulum Publications, 2/-) and appears to be the first in the Pendulum Popular Film Series.

Since it was inevitable that sooner or later somebody would write a book about Welles and his achievements (as it happens, later), I am glad that it is Mr. Fowler who has taken the plunge, for not only is he a great admirer of the man he writes about, but he quite probably knows more about his subject than anybody else in Europe. Described as a first biography, the book is not really long enough to tell us very much about the life and work of Orson Welles, but, nevertheless, it does manage to pack quite a large number of intriguing facts concerning his art and achievements between its covers, the majority of which have not, until now, been known in England. Admirably illustrated and produced, this little book is a valuable addition to the growing library of authoritative works on the film, and marks Mr. Fowler out as a young author to watch carefully in the future.

What appears to be an advertising brochure for a section of the British film industry has just been published by McKenzie Vincent & Co., Glasgow, priced at 4/6, and called **PROGRESS OF BRITISH FILMS—PART ONE**. It consists of two articles sandwiched between numerous publicity handouts for a score of British films of the past few years. The illustrations are only fair, spoilt by the inclusion of several self-conscious pin-up pictures. Can you imagine sedate Anne Crawford in short shorts prancing with a walking stick? Or demure Phyllis Calvert posing uncomfortably in silk knickers against a Fred Daniels backdrop?

The publication is not representative of the best in British films; no documentaries are included, and there is not one mention of any production of Ealing Studios. Nor are any Ealing films represented in the illustrations, although a mediocre film like *The Common Touch* has five pages to itself. For no apparent reason there is a full-page reproduction of the Gainsborough trade mark (?), while other incongruities include four separate photographs of Anne Crawford, and no indication that the editor has ever heard of a dozen other prominent British players (presumably the facts that Miss Crawford comes from Scotland and that this book is published in Glasgow are more than a coincidence?). There are a number of errors. *One of Our Aircraft Is Missing* was produced by British National and *not* Archers, while I know of no actor called Desmond Knight.

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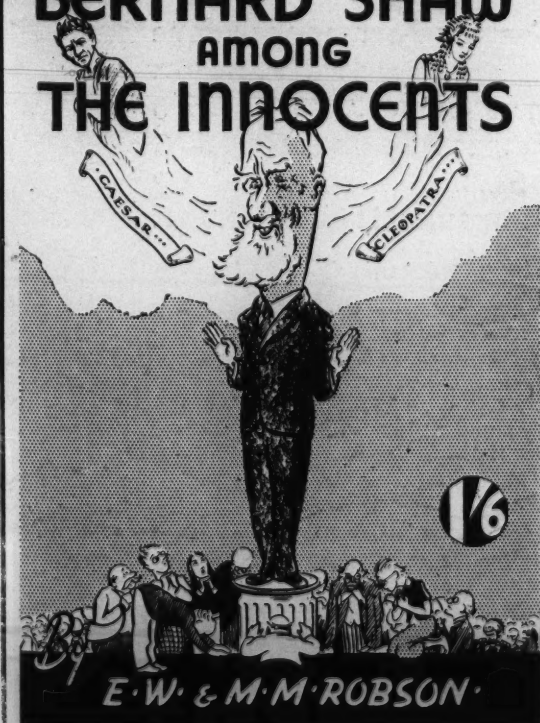
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